

The Love Ditty of an 'eartsick Pirate

It's time we be goin', me hearty, avast!
When the night's nailed up its colours to its mast
Like some swab loaded to the gun'les 'n' lashed to the plank;
Arr, make our way by th' ghosty ports o' call,
The bloody Triangle,
Quietin' the parrots, kippin' in dens of iniquity,
Where the scraps o' the earth mixes with the scrapin's o' the sea:
Down alleys where ye argues if ye durst:
The forebodin' of th' accursed:
An' all to get ye to the point of a certain little matter . . .
Nay, never ask what it may be,
There be a gentleman I'd like ye to see.

In yon chamber the ladies do perambulate
A-jabbering o' some oilpaint addle pate.

Arrr, th' mist what do rub itself upon yon portholes,
Th' ghoulish-coloured mist that be rubbin' its muzzle on yon portholes
Licked its chops round the corners o' the evenin' as if it was ship's biscuit,
Wafted over yon pools o' seeping bilgewater,
Lettin' the smokestacks mark it wi' their black spots o' smuts;
Crept up past the crow's nest for to ambush wi' a sudden leap,
And, seein' no land nor nary a star, nay, only the soft poetic lappin' o' the waves,
Curled itself round about and aye fell into a slumber like that o' the deep.

And lo! the clock will tick but slow
For the sallow smoke upon yon promenade,
Aye swabbin' the portholes as it goes among 'em;
Ye'll hear the ticks but few, the tocks but far between,
As ye be composin' yersel' t'engage with yon privateers;
There'll be time to do yer scurvy worst, and aye to mend yer sails,
And time itself'll becalm all the works and days of hands
That do raise up an' be a-placin' o' the black spot upon ye, the curs;
Becalmed we'll be, both you an' me,
Time'll be fer makin' and fer breakin' consort,
Time'll be fer full tack an' fer comin' round again,
Afor the chowder an' rumfustian.

In yon chamber the ladies do perambulate
A-jabbering o' some oilpaint addlepate.

And I swear to ye, we'll be becalmed enough
To wonder, 'Does I dare?' and, 'Does I dare?' like some custardy lout,
To go below decks as yon galleon comes about,
As me scarf flies off in th'wind an' shows me pewter-pate —
(The swabs a-deck'll say, 'thar I'll polish my trusty blade afor th'mornin'')
My long clothes, the unaccustomed way they do rise up about mychin,
The kerchief presentable, and done up tight wi' a rusty pin,
(The swabs'll say, 'he's but a lily-livered flabber, by the Dutchman!')
Arrr, does I dare
Create upheavals, aye, to sway the tides?
Yon tides roll slow
Over the dead reckonin', the tack, the yellow jack, they roll both in an' out.
For I be accustomed to 'em all, to be sure, already
Accustomed to yon sunsets, daybreaks, the long days over the mendin',
For a pirate's days are numbered like drops o' rum in a nipperkin;
I've aheard 'em, yon voices whisp'rin in the galley,
While overhead some poor soul dances with Jack Ketch.
So whatwise is I but a swabbin' wretch?

An' I'm accustomed to that dreadnought look,
The deadlights fixin' ye with their mighty rays,
And when I be sworn and oathed and sprawlin',
When I be fastened up like a long coat, writhin' on a hook,
Then how should I start me caterwaulin' —
To spit out all the rum-butt-lees of my piratin' days 'n' ways?
An' whatwise is I but a swabbin' wretch?

And I've been accustomed to lasses' arms, aye, every one o' them, all
Bejewelled and shinin' like the sands o' Barbary of old,
(But by the torchlight, glitterin' with hairs like threads of gold!)
Arrr, is it the scent from a lady's gown
That makes this buccaneer drag on?
The arms, as I was sayin', that lie upon a table, or belay a shawl.
An' whatwise is I but a swabbin' wretch?
An' whatwise is I but a swab, a-fallin'?'
D'ye want me to confess me way o' creepin' through narrow
mizzens at dusk An' watchin' the smoke that rises from the pipes O' lonely men at
arms, leanin' thoughtful-like over the endless briny deep? . . .

I should've been a pair o' yon scraggy claws
Scuttlin' down in the hold o' that briny deep.

And the hour o' the zenith, e'en aye the lonely sundown, slumbers like the
drowned!

Swabbed by some cutlass-fingered hand,
Snorin' . . . or swingin' the lead betimes . . . or mayhap becalmed,
Takin' its ease on the deck, here atwixt us two.
Arrr, an' should I, after hardtack an' bumboo an' barnacle-lollies,
Be pirate enough to force the moment an' expose me follies?

But though I 'ave blubbed, and gone without me grog, blubbed an' pulled me
beard

Though I 'ave 'ad visions of me own head hoist upon yon mast,
I 'ave no crystal ball; and 'ere's the worst;
I knows me glory days upon yon silver road are jiggered;
The eternal Cap'n 'as fingered the black spot an' sniggered;
An' I was unpiratically afeared.

An' will it 'ave been a rum account, d'ye list,
After yon blackjacks, yon seaweed-jam, yon chowder,
Amid the tack and the spare riggin's, amid some milksop jabber,
Will it 'ave been within a filibuster's rights
To 'ave bit the thing off wi' a show o' yer pearly whites,
To 'ave rolled the universe up in the palm o' yer fist,
To lob it at the main point o' yer interrogation —
To say, 'I am Davy Jones hisself, woke from the sleep o' the damned,
Come back to tell you all, I'll tell you, whist' —
If yon beauty, a-settlin' 'erself more cozy-like
Was to say, 'that ain't my point, so it arn't, That just arn't it, so it arn't.'

An' will it 'ave been a rum account, d'ye list,
Will it 'ave been turned to account,
After the blazin' sunsets and the galleys an' the secrets in the riggin's,
After the tales, after the black jacks, after the long skirts a-trailin' on the deck,
Aye, an' the rest? It be'n't possible to tell what do avail!
But like as if some magic lanthorn threw me nerves upon the sail:
Will it 'a' been a rum account
If yon wench, settlin' in cosy-like or throwin' off her shawl,
Lookin' fretful out yon porthole, should 'ave muttered,

‘That just arn’t it, so it arn’t, that just arn’t my point at all.’

Nay! I was never no Blackbeard, nor was meant to be;
Am a faithful Bosun, ’e that will aye
Comb out yon cat o’ nine tails, start a fray,
Advise the Cap’n; serve as an easy weapon,
Balanceful in the ’and, glad to be of use,
Born under the Code o’ the Brethren, arrr,
Full of ’igh purpose, but ne’er so bright a spark;
Oftimes, by me ’ook, almost a-bletherin’ —
Almost, betimes, mere swab.

I grows old... I grows old...
I shall wear me pantaloons a-rolled.

Shall I tip me ’at to me neck? Could I bear to bite a leech?
I shall put me long clothes on and wander up the beach.
I ’ave ’arked at them mermaids, singin’ each to each.

I’m never thinkin’ they’ll be singin’ to me.

I ’ave spied ’em ridin’ out upon yon surf,
Combin’ the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind do whish the water white and black.
We ’as lingered in the cabins o’ the deep
Wi’ girls bedecked in bladderwrack, red an’ brown,
Till lubberly prattle wakes us — an’ we drown.