

GOTHIC BOURNES

**THE ENGLISH SAILOR AND THE
KING OF ACHEN'S DAUGHTER:
A TALE OF TERROR
(1819)**

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(pages 323-325)

THE ENGLISH SAILOR AND THE KING
OF ACHEN'S DAUGHTER

A Tale of Terror.

[323] COME, listen Gentles all,
And Ladies unto me,
And you shall be told of a Sailor bold
As ever sail'd on Sea.

'Twas in the month of May,
Sixteen hundred sixty and four,
We sallied out, both fresh and stout,
In the good ship Swift-sure.

With wind and weather fair
We sail'd from Plymouth Sound,
And the Line we cross'd, and the Cape we pass'd,
Being to China bound.

And we sail'd by Sunda Isles,
And Ternate and Tydore,
Till the wind it lagg'd, and our sails they flagg'd,
In sight of Achen's shore.

Becalm'd, days three times three,
We lay in th' burning sun;
Our Water we drank, and our Meat it stank,
And our Biscuits were well nigh¹ 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,
And our cheeks were yellow and lean—
Our faces all long, and our nerves unstrung,
And loose and squalid our skin.

¹ Almost / Very nearly.

And we walk'd up and down the deck
As long as our legs could bear us;
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,
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 evil,
Had blown on our troubled Sprite.

At last, so it happ'd one night,
When we all in our hammocks lay,
Bereft of breath, and expecting death
To come ere² break of day,

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

I open'd my half-closed eyes,
And my mouth I open'd it wide,
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
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.

He was drest³ in a Seamen's jacket,
Wet trowsers, and dripping hose,
And an unfelt wind, I heard behind,
That whistled among his clothes.

² This preposition has the same meaning as "before".

³ Alternative spelling of "dressed".

I look'd at him by the light of the stars,
I look'd by the light of the moon,
And I saw, though his face was cover'd with scars,
John Jewkes, my Sister's Son.

"Alas! John Jewkes," I cried,
"Poor boy, what brings thee here?"
But nothing he said, but hung down his head,
And made his bare scull⁴ appear.

Then I, by my grief grown bold,
To take his hand endeavour'd,
But his head he turn'd round, which a gaping wound
Had nigh from his shoulders sever'd.

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

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,
Three years ago to-day,
[324] How at Aunt's we tarried, when Sister was married
To Farmer Robin, pray?

"Oh! Then we were blythe⁵ and jolly,
But none of us all had seen,
While we sung and we laugh'd, and the stout ale quaff'd,
That our number was thirteen.

"And none of all the party,
At the head of the table, saw,
While our cares were drown'd, and the flaggon went round,
Old Goody Martha Daw.

"But Martha she was there,
Though she never spake⁶ a word;
And by her sat her old black cat,
Though it never cried or purr'd.

⁴ Alternative spelling of "skull".

⁵ Old fashioned expression used to express joy.

⁶ Alternative form of the past tense of the verb "to speak".

“And she lean’d on her oaken crutch,
And a bundle of sticks she broke,
And her prayers backward mutter’d, and the Devil’s words utter’d,
Though she never a word out spoke.

“ ’Twas on a Thursday morn,
That very day was se’nnight,⁷
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,
That I still might love her, forgetting her never –
So I put it in my pocket.

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

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

“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
All on the shoals of Achen,
And all then did die, save only I,
And I hardly saved my bacon.

“It happ’d that very hour,
The black king walking by
Did see me sprawling, on 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,
And not above twenty-three,

⁷ Old fashioned term for the noun “week”.

“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.

“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
Did open her casement to see;
And, as she look’d round on the gooseberry ground,
Her eyes they lit upon me;

“And seeing me tall and slim,
And of shape right personable;
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,⁸
And would make a gallant Lover.

“So she tripp’d from her chamber so high,
All in silks and sattins clad,
And her gown is rustled, as down she bustled,
With steps like a Princess sad.

“Her shoes they were deck’d with pearls,
And her hair with diamonds glisten’d,
And her gimcracks and toys, they made such a noise,
My mouth water’d the while I listen’d.

“Then she tempted me with glances,
And with sugar’d words so tender,
(And tho’ she was black, she was straight in the back,
And young, and tall, and slender—)

“But I my Love remember’d,
And the lockit she did give me,
And resolv’d to be true to my darling Sue,
As she did ever believe me.

⁸ Old fashioned term for the noun “truth”.

“Whereat the Princess wax’d
Both furious and angry,
And said, she was sure I had some Paramour⁹
In kitchen or in laundry.

“And then, with a devilish grin,
She said, ‘Give me your locket’—
But I damn’d her for a Witch, and a conjuring Bitch,
And kept it in my pocket.

“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,
‘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,
And the thoughts of Old England, they made my heart tingle, and
I gave up the locket so true.

[325] “Thereon she laugh’d outright
With a hellish grin, and I saw
That the Princess was gone, and in her room
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 cross’d
And away we flew, swift as the wind.

“But my head it soon turn’d giddy,
I reel’d and lost my balance,
So I tumbled over, like a perjur’d lover,
A warning to all gallants.

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

⁹ Lover.

“Hence, all ye¹⁰ English gallants,
A warning take by me,
Your true love’s locket to keep in your pocket
Whenever you go to sea.

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

“‘Twas three years ago 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.

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

“And, as we both have died,
(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,
You’ll promise, and promise truly,
To plough the main for England again,
And perform my orders duly,

“Old Davy will allow you
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,
To Laure’ston town you’ll go,
And then to the Mayor, in open fair,
Impeach old Martha Daw.

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

¹⁰ Alternative form of the pronoun “you”.

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

The grissly [sic] Spectre thus
In mournful accents spoke,
By which time, being morning, he gave me no warning,
But vanish’d in sulphur and smoke.

Next day there sprang up a breeze,
And our ship began to tack,
And for fear of the Ghost, we left the coast,
And sail’d for England back.

And I being come home,
Did all his words pursue;
Old Martha likewise was hung at the ‘size,¹¹
And I carried the locket to Sue.

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
When the number is thirteen;
And, lest witches be there, put salt in your beer,
And scrape your platters clean.

This “Tale of Terror” was composed at the express request of a distinguished female, nearly related (by marriage and genius) to its no less distinguished author.—In return, this matchless female christened a lovely and promising boy, of whom she was delivered, during the stay of the Ensign, after the name of Odoherly; an appellation, the ideas suggested by which, will be agreeable, or otherwise, to its bearer, according as he shall, in future years, inherit or not inherit, some portion of the genius in whose honour it was originally conferred. [...]

¹¹ Short form of “assize”.