

# Lyrical Ballads, Volume I — The Ancient Mariner

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THE  
ANCIENT MARINER,

A POET'S REVERIE.

*ARGUMENT.*

How a Ship, having first sailed to the Equator, was driven by Storms, to the cold Country towards the South Pole; how the Ancient Mariner cruelly, and in contempt of the laws of hospitality, killed a Sea-bird; and how he was followed by many and strange Judgements; and in what manner he came back to his own Country.

*The ANCIENT MARINER.*

*A POET'S REVERIE.*

# I.



It is an ancient Mariner,  
And he stoppeth one of three:  
"By thy long grey beard and thy glittering eye  
"Now wherefore stoppest me?"

"The Bridegroom's doors are open'd wide  
"And I am next of kin;  
"The Guests are met, the Feast is set,—  
"May'st hear the merry din.

But still he holds the wedding guest—  
There was a Ship, quoth he—  
"Nay; if thou'st got a laughsome tale,  
"Mariner! come with me."

He holds him with his skinny hand,  
Quoth he, there was a Ship—

"Now get thee hence, thou grey-beard Loon!  
"Or my Staff shall make thee skip.

He holds him with his glittering eye—  
The wedding guest stood still  
And listens like a three year's child;  
The Mariner hath his will.

The wedding-guest sate on a stone,  
He cannot chuse but hear:  
And thus spake on that ancient man,  
The bright-eyed Mariner.

The Ship was cheer'd, the Harbour clear'd—  
Merrily did we drop  
Below the Kirk, below the Hill,  
Below the Light-house top.

The Sun came up upon the left,  
Out of the Sea came he:  
And he shone bright, and on the right  
Went down into the Sea.

Higher and higher every day,

Till over the mast at noon—  
The wedding-guest here beat his breast,  
For he heard the loud bassoon.

The Bride hath pac'd into the Hall,  
Red as a rose is she;  
Nodding their heads before her goes  
The merry Minstralsy.

The wedding-guest he beat his breast,  
Yet he cannot chuse but hear:  
And thus spake on that ancient Man,  
The bright-eyed Mariner.

But now the Northwind came more fierce,  
There came a Tempest strong!  
And Southward still for days and weeks  
Like Chaff we drove along.

And now there came both Mist and Snow,  
And it grew wondrous cold;  
And Ice mast-high came floating by  
As green as Emerald.

And thro' the drifts the snowy clifts  
    Did send a dismal sheen;  
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—  
    The Ice was all between.

The Ice was here, the Ice was there,  
    The Ice was all around:  
It crack'd and growl'd, and roar'd and howl'd—  
    A wild and ceaseless sound.

At length did cross an Albatross,  
    Thorough the Fog it came;  
As if it had been a Christian Soul,  
    We hail'd it in God's name.

The Mariners gave it biscuit-worms,  
    And round and round it flew:  
The Ice did split with a Thunder-fit;  
    The Helmsman steer'd us thro'.

And a good south wind sprung up behind,  
    The Albatross did follow;

And every day for food or play  
Came to the Mariner's hollo!

In mist or cloud on mast or shroud  
It perch'd for vespers nine,  
Whiles all the night thro' fog-smoke white  
Glimmer'd the white moon-shine.

"God save thee, ancient Mariner!  
"From the fiends that plague thee thus—  
"Why look'st thou so?"—with my cross bow  
I shot the Albatross.

## II.



The Sun now rose upon the right,

Out of the Sea came he;  
Still hid in mist; and on the left  
Went down into the Sea.

And the good south wind still blew behind,  
But no sweet Bird did follow  
Nor any day for food or play  
Came to the Mariner's hollo!

And I had done an hellish thing  
And it would work e'm woe:  
For all averr'd, I had kill'd the Bird  
That made the Breeze to blow.

Nor dim nor red, like an Angel's head;  
The glorious Sun uprist:  
Then all averr'd, I had kill'd the Bird  
That brought the fog and mist.  
'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay  
That bring the fog and mist.

The breezes blew, the white foam flew,  
The furrow follow'd free:



We were the first that ever burst  
    Into that silent Sea.

Down dropt the breeze, the Sails dropt down,  
    'Twas sad as sad could be  
And we did speak only to break  
    The silence of the Sea.

All in a hot and copper sky  
    The bloody sun at noon,  
Right up above the mast did stand,  
    No bigger than the moon.

Day after day, day after day,  
    We stuck, nor breath nor motion,  
As idle as a painted Ship  
    Upon a painted Ocean.

Water, water, every where  
    And all the boards did shrink;  
Water, water, every where,  
    Nor any drop to drink.

The very deeps did rot: O Christ!

That ever this should be!  
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs  
Upon the slimy Sea.

About, about, in reel and rout  
The Death-fires danc'd at night;  
The water, like a witch's oils,  
Burnt green and blue and white.

And some in dreams assured were  
Of the Spirit that plagued us so:  
Nine fathom deep he had follow'd us  
From the Land of Mist and Snow.

And every tongue thro' utter drouth  
Was wither'd at the root;  
We could not speak no more than if  
We had been choked with soot.

Ah wel-a-day! what evil looks  
Had I from old and young;  
Instead of the Cross the Albatross  
About my neck was hung.

### III.



So past a weary time; each throat  
    Was parch'd, and glaz'd each eye,  
When, looking westward, I beheld  
    A something in the sky.

At first it seem'd a little speck  
    And then it seem'd a mist:  
It mov'd and mov'd, and took at last  
    A certain shape, I wist.

A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!  
    And still it ner'd and ner'd;  
And, as if it dodg'd a water-sprite,  
    It plung'd and tack'd and veer'd.

With throat unslack'd, with black lips bak'd  
    We could nor laugh nor wail;  
Thro' utter drouth all dumb we stood  
Till I bit my arm and suck'd the blood,  
    And cry'd, A sail! a sail!

With throat unslack'd, with black lips bak'd  
    Agape they heard me call:  
Gramercy! they for joy did grin  
And all at once their breath drew in  
    As they were drinking all.

See! See! (I cry'd) she tacks no more!  
    Hither to work us weal  
Without a breeze, without a tide  
    She steddies with upright keel!

The western wave was all a flame,  
    The day was well nigh done!  
Almost upon the western wave  
    Rested the broad bright Sun;  
When that strange shape drove suddenly  
    Betwixt us and the Sun.

And strait the Sun was fleck'd with bars  
    (Heaven's mother send us grace)  
As if thro' a dungeon grate he peer'd  
    With broad and burning face.

Alas! (thought I, and my heart beat loud)  
    How fast she neres and neres!  
Are those *her* Sails that glance in the Sun  
    Like restless gossameres?

Are those *her* Ribs, thro' which the Sun  
    Did peer, as thro' a grate?  
And are those two all, all her crew,  
    That Woman, and her Mate?

*His* bones were black with many a crack,  
    All black and bare, I ween;  
Jet-black and bare, save where with rust  
Of mouldy damps and charnel crust  
    They were patch'd with purple and green.

*Her* lips were red, *her* looks were free,  
    *Her* locks were yellow as gold:

Her skin was as white as leprosy,  
And she was far liker Death than he;  
Her flesh made the still air cold.

The naked Hulk alongside came  
And the Twain were playing dice;  
"The Game is done! I've won, I've won!"  
Quoth she, and whistled thrice.

A gust of wind sterte up behind  
And whistled thro' his bones;  
Thro' the holes of his eyes and the hole of his mouth  
Half-whistles and half-groans.

With never a whisper in the Sea  
Off darts the Spectre-ship;  
While clombe above the Eastern bar  
The horned Moon, with one bright Star  
Almost between the tips.

One after one by the horned Moon  
(Listen, O Stranger! to me)  
Each turn'd his face with a ghastly pang  
And curs'd me with his ee.

Four times fifty living men,  
    With never a sigh or groan,  
With heavy thump, a lifeless lump  
    They dropp'd down one by one.

Their souls did from their bodies fly,—  
    They fled to bliss or woe;  
And every soul it pass'd me by,  
    Like the whiz of my Cross-bow.

#### IV.



"I fear thee, ancient Mariner!  
    "I fear thy skinny hand;  
"And thou art long and lank and brown  
    "As is the ribb'd Sea-sand.

"I fear thee and thy glittering eye  
    "And thy skinny hand so brown—  
Fear not, fear not, thou wedding guest!  
    This body dropt not down.

Alone, alone, all all alone  
    Alone on the wide wide Sea;  
And Christ would take no pity on  
    My soul in agony.

The many men so beautiful,  
    And they all dead did lie!  
And a million million slimy things  
    Liv'd on—and so did I.

I look'd upon the rotting Sea,  
    And drew my eyes away;  
I look'd upon the ghastly deck,  
    And there the dead men lay.

I look'd to Heaven, and try'd to pray;  
    But or ever a prayer had gusht,



A wicked whisper came and made  
My heart as dry as dust.

I clos'd my lids and kept them close,  
Till the balls like pulses beat;  
For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky  
Lay like a load on my weary eye,  
And the dead were at my feet.

The cold sweat melted from their limbs,  
Nor rot, nor reek did they;  
The look with which they look'd on me,  
Had never pass'd away.

An orphan's curse would drag to Hell  
A spirit from on high:  
But O! more horrible than that  
Is the curse in a dead man's eye!  
Seven days, seven nights I saw that curse,  
And yet I could not die.

The moving Moon went up the sky  
And no where did abide:

Softly she was going up  
And a star or two beside—

Her beams bemock'd the sultry main  
Like April hoar-frost spread;  
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,  
The charmed water burnt away  
A still and awful red.

Beyond the shadow of the ship  
I watch'd the water-snakes:  
They mov'd in tracks of shining white;  
And when they rear'd, the elfish light  
Fell off in hoary flakes;

Within the shadow of the ship  
I watch'd their rich attire:  
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black  
They coil'd and swam; and every track  
Was a flash of golden fire.

O happy living things! no tongue  
Their beauty might declare:  
A spring of love gusht from my heart,

And I bless'd them unaware!  
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,  
And I bless'd them unaware.

The self-same moment I could pray;  
And from my neck so free  
The Albatross fell off, and sank  
Like lead into the sea.

V.



O sleep, it is a gentle thing  
Belov'd from pole to pole!  
To Mary-queen the praise be given  
She sent the gentle sleep from heaven  
That slid into my soul.

The silly buckets on the deck  
That had so long remain'd,  
I dreamt that they were fill'd with dew  
And when I awoke it rain'd.

My lips were wet, my throat was cold,  
My garments all were dank;  
Sure I had drunken in my dreams  
And still my body drank.

I mov'd and could not feel my limbs,  
I was so light, almost  
I thought that I had died in sleep,  
And was a blessed Ghost.

And soon I heard a roaring wind,  
It did not come anear;  
But with its sound it shook the sails  
That were so thin and sere.

The upper air burst into life  
And a hundred fire-flags sheen  
To and fro they were hurried about;

And to and fro, and in and out  
The wan stars danc'd between.

And the coming wind did roar more loud;  
And the sails did sigh like sedge:  
And the rain pour'd down from one black cloud  
The moon was at its edge.

The thick black cloud was cleft, and still  
The Moon was at its side:  
Like waters shot from some high crag,  
The lightning fell with never a jag  
A river steep and wide.

The loud wind never reach'd the Ship,  
Yet now the Ship mov'd on!  
Beneath the lightning and the moon  
The dead men gave a groan.

They groan'd, they stirr'd, they all uprose,  
Nor spake, nor mov'd their eyes:  
It had been strange, even in a dream  
To have seen those dead men rise.

The helmsman steer'd, the ship mov'd on;  
    Yet never a breeze up-blew;  
The Mariners all 'gan work the ropes,  
    Where they were wont to do:  
They rais'd their limbs like lifeless tools—  
    We were a ghastly crew.

The body of my brother's son  
    Stood by me knee to knee:  
The body and I pull'd at one rope,  
    But he said nought to me.

"I fear thee, ancient Mariner!  
    Be calm, thou wedding guest!  
'Twas not those souls, that fled in pain,  
Which to their corses came again,  
    But a troop of Spirits blest:

For when it dawn'd—they dropp'd their arms,  
    And cluster'd round the mast:  
Sweet sounds rose slowly thro' their mouths  
    And from their bodies pass'd.

Around, around, flew each sweet sound,  
Then darted to the sun:  
Slowly the sounds came back again  
Now mix'd, now one by one.

Sometimes a dropping from the sky  
I heard the Sky-lark sing;  
Sometimes all little birds that are  
How they seem'd to fill the sea and air  
With their sweet jargoning.

And now 'twas like all instruments,  
Now like a lonely flute;  
And now it is an angel's song  
That makes the heavens be mute.

It ceas'd: yet still the sails made on  
A pleasant noise till noon,  
A noise like of a hidden brook  
In the leafy month of June,  
That to the sleeping woods all night  
Singeth a quiet tune.

Till noon we silently sail'd on  
    Yet never a breeze did breathe:  
Slowly and smoothly went the Ship  
    Mov'd onward from beneath.

Under the keel nine fathom deep  
    From the land of mist and snow  
The spirit slid: and it was He  
    That made the Ship to go.  
The sails at noon left off their tune  
    And the Ship stood still also.

The sun right up above the mast  
    Had fix'd her to the ocean:  
But in a minute she 'gan stir  
    With a short uneasy motion—  
Backwards and forwards half her length  
    With a short uneasy motion.

Then, like a pawing horse let go,  
    She made a sudden bound:  
It flung the blood into my head,  
    And I fell into a swound.



How long in that same fit I lay,  
I have not to declare;  
But ere my living life return'd,  
I heard and in my soul discern'd  
Two voices in the air.

"Is it he? quoth one, "Is this the man?  
"By him who died on cross,  
"With his cruel bow he lay'd full low  
"The harmless Albatross.

"The spirit who 'bideth by himself  
"In the land of mist and snow,  
"He lov'd the bird that lov'd the man  
"Who shot him with his bow.

The other was a softer voice,  
As soft as honey-dew:  
Quoth he the man hath penance done,  
And penance more will do.

## VI.



### FIRST VOICE.

"But tell me, tell me! speak again,  
"Thy soft response renewing—  
"What makes that ship drive on so fast?  
"What is the Ocean doing?

### SECOND VOICE.

"Still as a Slave before his Lord,  
"The Ocean hath no blast:  
"His great bright eye most silently  
"Up to the moon is cast—

"If he may know which way to go,  
"For she guides him smooth or grim.  
"See, brother, see! how graciously  
"She looketh down on him.

FIRST VOICE.

"But why drives on that ship so fast  
"Without or wave or wind?

SECOND VOICE.

"The air is cut away before,  
"And closes from behind.

"Fly, brother, fly! more high, more high,  
"Or we shall be belated:  
"For slow and slow that ship will go,  
"When the Mariners trance is abated."

I woke, and we were sailing on  
As in a gentle weather:

'Twas night, calm night, the moon was high;  
The dead men stood together.

All stood together on the deck,  
For a charnel-dungeon fitter:  
All fix'd on me their stony eyes  
That in the moon did glitter.

The pang, the curse, with which they died,  
Had never pass'd away;  
I could not draw my eyes from theirs  
Nor turn them up to pray.

And now this spell was snapt: once more  
I view'd the ocean green,  
And look'd far forth, yet little saw  
Of what had else been seen.

Like one, that on a lonesome road  
Doth walk in fear and dread,  
And having once turn'd round, walks on  
And turns no more his head:  
Because he knows, a frightful fiend  
Doth close behind him tread.

But soon there breath'd a wind on me,  
Nor sound nor motion made:  
Its path was not upon the sea  
In ripple or in shade.

It rais'd my hair, it fann'd my cheek,  
Like a meadow-gale of spring—  
It mingled strangely with my fears,  
Yet it felt like a welcoming.

Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship  
Yet she sail'd softly too:  
Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze—  
On me alone it blew.

O dream of joy! is this indeed  
The light-house top I see?  
Is this the Hill? Is this the Kirk?  
Is this mine own countrée?

We drifted o'er the Harbour-bar,  
And I with sobs did pray—

"O let me be awake, my God!  
"Or let me sleep away!"

The harbour-bay was clear as glass,  
So smoothly it was strewn!  
And on the bay the moonlight lay,  
And the shadow of the moon.

The rock shone bright, the kirk no less  
That stands above the rock:  
The moonlight steep'd in silentness  
The steady weathercock.

And the bay was white with silent light,  
Till rising from the same  
Full many shapes, that shadows were,  
In crimson colours came.

A little distance from the prow  
Those crimson shadows were:  
I turn'd my eyes upon the deck—  
O Christ! what saw I there?

Each corse lay flat, lifeless and flat;

And by the Holy rood  
A man all light, a seraph-man,  
On every corse there stood.

This seraph-band, each wav'd his hand:  
It was a heavenly sight:  
They stood as signals to the land,  
Each one a lovely light:

This seraph-band, each wav'd his hand,  
No voice did they impart—  
No voice; but O! the silence sank,  
Like music on my heart.

But soon I heard the dash of oars,  
I heard the pilot's cheer:  
My head was turn'd perforce away  
And I saw a boat appear.

The pilot, and the pilot's boy  
I heard them coming fast:  
Dear Lord in Heaven! it was a joy,  
The dead men could not blast.

I saw a third—I heard his voice:  
It is the Hermit good!  
He singeth loud his godly hymns  
That he makes in the wood.  
He'll shrieve my soul, he'll wash away  
The Albatross's blood.

## VII.



This Hermit good lives in that wood  
Which slopes down to the Sea.  
How loudly his sweet voice he rears!  
He loves to talk with Mariners  
That come from a far countreé.

He kneels at morn and noon and eve—  
He hath a cushion plump:



It is the moss, that wholly hides  
The rotted old Oak-stump.

The Skiff-boat ner'd: I heard them talk,  
"Why, this is strange, I trow!  
"Where are those lights so many and fair  
"That signal made but now?

"Strange, by my faith! the Hermit said—  
"And they answer'd not our cheer.  
"The planks look warp'd, and see those sails  
"How thin they are and sere!  
"I never saw aught like to them  
"Unless perchance it were

"The skeletons of leaves that lag  
"My forest brook along:  
"When the Ivy-tod is heavy with snow,  
"And the Owllet whoops to the wolf below  
"That eats the she-wolf's young.

"Dear Lord! it has a fiendish look—  
(The Pilot made reply)

"I am a-fear'd.—"Push on, push on!  
"Said the Hermit cheerily.

The Boat came closer to the Ship,  
But I nor spake nor stirr'd!  
The Boat came close beneath the Ship,  
And strait a sound was heard!

Under the water it rumbled on,  
Still louder and more dread:  
It reach'd the Ship, it split the bay;  
The Ship went down like lead.

Stunn'd by that loud and dreadful sound,  
Which sky and ocean smote:  
Like one that hath been seven days drown'd  
My body lay afloat:  
But, swift as dreams, myself I found  
Within the Pilot's boat.

Upon the whirl, where sank the Ship,  
The boat spun round and round:  
And all was still, save that the hill  
Was telling of the sound.

I mov'd my lips: the Pilot shriek'd  
    And fell down in a fit.  
The Holy Hermit rais'd his eyes  
    And pray'd where he did sit.

I took the oars: the Pilot's boy,  
    Who now doth crazy go,  
Laugh'd loud and long, and all the while  
    His eyes went to and fro,  
"Ha! ha!" quoth he—"full plain I see,  
    "The devil knows how to row."

And now all in mine own Countree  
    I stood on the firm land!  
The Hermit stepp'd forth from the boat,  
    And scarcely he could stand.

"O shrieve me, shrieve me, holy Man!"  
    The Hermit cross'd his brow—  
"Say quick," quoth he, I bid thee say  
    "What manner man art thou?"

forthwith this frame of mind was wrench'd

With a woeful agony,  
Which forc'd me to begin my tale  
And then it left me free.

Since then at an uncertain hour,  
That agency returns;  
And till my ghastly tale is told  
This heart within me burns.

I pass, like night, from land to land;  
I have strange power of speech;  
The moment that his face I see  
I know the man that must hear me;  
To him my tale I teach.

What loud uproar bursts from that door!  
The Wedding-guests are there;  
But in the Garden-bower the Bride  
And Bride-maids singing are:  
And hark the little Vesper-bell  
Which biddeth me to prayer.

O Wedding-guest! this soul hath been  
Alone on a wide wide sea:

So lonely 'twas, that God himself  
Scarce seemed there to be.

O sweeter than the Marriage-feast,  
'Tis sweeter far to me  
To walk together to the Kirk  
With a goodly company.

To walk together to the Kirk  
And all together pray,  
While each to his great father bends,  
Old men, and babes, and loving friends,  
And Youths, and Maidens gay.

Farewell, farewell! but this I tell  
To thee, thou wedding-guest!  
He prayeth well who loveth well  
Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best who loveth best  
All things both great and small:  
For the dear God, who loveth us,  
He made and loveth all.

The Mariner, whose eye is bright,  
    Whose beard with age is hoar,  
Is gone; and now the wedding-guest  
    Turn'd from the bridegroom's door.

He went, like one that hath been stunn'd  
    And is of sense forlorn:  
A sadder and a wiser man  
    He rose the morrow morn.



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