

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)

29 *The Sea-Wife*

There dwells a wife by the Northern Gate,  
And a wealthy wife is she;  
She breeds a breed of roving men  
And casts them over sea.

And some are drowned in deep water, 5  
And some in sight o' shore,  
And word goes back to the weary wife  
And ever she sends more.

For since that wife had gate or gear,  
Or hearth or garth or field, 10  
She willed her sons to the white harvest,  
And that is a bitter yield.

She wills her sons to the wet ploughing,  
To ride the horse of tree;  
And syne her sons come back again 15  
Far-spent from out the sea.

The good wife's sons come home again  
With little into their hands,  
But the lore of men that have dealt with men  
In the new and naked lands; 20

But the faith of men that have brothered men  
By more than easy breath,  
And the eyes of men that have read with men  
In the open books of Death.

Rich are they, rich in wonders seen, 25

But poor in the goods of men;  
So what they have got by the skin of their teeth  
They sell for their teeth again.

And whether they lose to the naked life  
Or win to their hearts' desire, 30  
They tell it all to the weary wife  
That nods beside the fire.

Her hearth is wide to every wind  
That makes the white ash spin;  
And tide and tide and 'tween the tides 35  
Her sons go out and in;

(Out with great mirth that do desire  
Hazard of trackless ways —  
In with content to wait their watch  
And warm before the blaze); 40

And some return by failing light,  
And some in waking dream,  
For she hears the heels of the dripping ghosts  
That ride the rough roof-beam.

Home, they come home from all the ports, 45  
The living and the dead;  
The good wife's sons come home again  
For her blessing on their head!

1893

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