

The Gray Swan

"Oh, tell me, sailor, tell me true,
Is my little lad, my Elihu,
A-sailing with your ship?"
The sailor's eyes were dim with dew—
"Your little lad, your Elihu?"
He said with trembling lip—
"What little lad? what ship?"
"What little lad! as if there could be
Another such an one as he!
What little lad, did you say?
Why, Elihu, that took to the sea
The moment I put him off my knee!
It was just the other day
The Gray Swan sailed away."
"The other day?" the sailor's eyes
Stood open with a great surprise—
"The other day? the Swan?"
His heart began in his throat to rise.
"Aye, aye, sir, here in the cupboard lies
The jacket he had on."
"And so your lad is gone?"
"Gone with the Swan." "And did she stand
With her anchor clutching hold of the sand,
For a month and never stir?"
"Why, to be sure! I've seen from the land.
Like a lover kissing his lady's hand,
The wild sea kissing her—
A sight to remember, sir."
"But, my good mother, do you know
All this was twenty years ago?
I stood on the Gray Swan's deck,
And to that lad I saw you throw,
Taking it off, as it might be, so!
The kerchief from your neck."
"Aye, and he'll bring it back!"
"And did the little lawless lad
That has made you sick and made you sad,
Sail with the Gray Swan's crew?"
"Lawless! the man is going mad!
The best boy ever mother had—
Be sure he sailed with the crew!
What would you have him do?"
"And he has never written line,
Nor sent you word, nor made you sign
To say he was alive!"
"Hold! if 'twas wrong, the wrong is mine,
Besides, he may be in the brine,
And could he write from the grave?
Tut, man! what would you have?"