

The Gosport Tragedy

The musical score is written on four staves in a 3/4 time signature with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The lyrics are: In Gos - port of late a young dam - sel did dwell. For wit and for beau - ty few could her ex - cel. A young man did court her for to be his dear, And he by his trade was a ship's car - pen - ter.

He said, "Dearest Mary, if you will agree
And give your consent, dear, for to marry me,
Your love, dear, can cure me of sorrow and care.
Consent then to wed with a ship carpenter."

With blushes as charming as roses in bloom
She said, "Dearest Willie, to wed I'm too young,
For young men are fickle I see very plain;
If a young maid is kind, her they quickly disdain."

"My own charming Mary, how can you say so?
Your beauty is the haven to which I would go,
And if I find channel and chance for to steer,
I there will cast anchor and stay with my dear."

It was all in vain that she strove to deny
For he, by his cunning, soon made her comply
And by his base deception he did her betray
And in sin's hellish path he did lead her astray.

Now when this young damsel with child she did prove
She soon sent the tidings to her faithless love.
He swore by the heavens that he would prove true
And said, "I will marry no damsel but you."

At length these sad tidings she came for to hear
His ship was a-sailing, for sea he must steer,
Which pained this poor damsel and wounded her heart
To think with her true love so soon she must part.

The Gosport Tragedy

She said, "Dearest Willie, ere you go to sea
 Remember the vows you have made unto me;
 If you go and leave me, I ne'er can find rest.
 Oh, how can you leave me with sorrow oppressed?"

With tender embraces he to her did say,
 "I'll marry my true love ere I go to sea
 And if on the morrow, my love, I can ride down,
 The ring I can buy our fond union to crown."

With tender embraces they parted that night
 And promised to meet the next morning at light.
 William said, "Dearest Mary, you must now go with me
 Before we are married, our friends for to see."

He led her o'er hills and through hollows so deep
 Till at length this fair damsel began for to weep.
 "Oh, Willie, I fear you have led me astray
 On purpose my innocent life to betray."

He said, "You've guessed right, for no power can you save,
 For 'twas only last night I was digging your grave."
 When poor, wretched Mary did hear him say so,
 The tears from her eyes like a fountain did flow.

Then down on her knees Mary to him did say,
 "Oh, take not my life lest my soul you betray.
 Oh, pity my infant, and spare my poor life;
 Let me live full of shame if I can't be your wife."

"Oh, there is no time thus disputing to stand,"
 And taking his sharp, cruel knife in his hand,
 He pierced her fair breast whence the blood it did flow
 And into the grave her fair body did throw.

He covered her body and quick hastened home,
 And left nothing but the small birds her fate for to mourn.
 He returned to his ship without any delay
 And set sail for Plymouth to plow the salt sea.

One night to the captain this fair maid did appear
 And she in her arms held an infant most dear.
 "Oh help me, oh help me," she to him did say.
 Then to his amazement she vanished away.

The captain then summoned his jovial ship's crew
And said, "My brave fellows, I fear some of you
Have murdered some damsel ere you came away
Whose injured ghost haunts you all on the salt sea."

Then poor, frightened Willie he fell on his knees
The blood in his veins seemed with horror to freeze.
It's, "Oh, cruel monster, and what have I done?
God help me, I fear my poor soul is undone.

"Oh, poor, injured Mary, your forgiveness I crave,
For soon must I follow you down to the grave."
No one but this poor wretch beheld the sad sight
And raving, distracted, he died the next night.

Note: My mother used to tell a story about my grandfather's sister, to whom she referred as Aunt Jinnie Hinds, who was singing this song one morning while out in the pasture milking her cow at her home in Windsor. A party of soldiers came along while she was singing and stood listening to her song. When the song was finished, they came forward and the captain gave her a piece of gold to sing them the song again.