

SHIPWRECK

HERMANN HAGEDORN

THE wind cried up from the east with a long thin wail.
The dark rolled over the stars, the dull sea rose.
And the Skipper turned from his light-o'-love by the rail
And his body tingled with sweat and his blood froze,
For he heard a babe, the cry of a babe in the gale.

“It's come at last, it's come! D'ye hear, d'ye hear?
Last night, d'ye hear? Last night, I tell ye, it came!
I heerd her moanin' all night, an' I knew it was near,
In my dreams I heerd her moanin' an' callin' my name,
Andy, Andy, Andy! like a hammer in my ear.

“An' at last near morning I heerd a cry, an' I knew!
A baby's cry, a bit of a second it cried.
An' ye woke me then an' I knew nothin' but you,
Till the dark came again an' whispered: ‘*They've died!*
They've died!’
An' I heerd the wind tellin' the sea as it blew.

“An' they're all alone on the Cape, an' round them's the night.
All alone in the bed she faced north to the sea,
That wherever I was I'd know one beacon-light
Was shinin', she'd say, thro' fog an' the dark, for me.
An' it's shinin' now! I can see it—stary an' white!”

The Skipper's light-o'-love she stood like an oak
Bred amid crags and whipped by the wild wind's scourge.
And the wind loosened her hair and tore at her cloak,
But she laughed like the spume back to the shouting surge
And the taunt of the deep spoke in her voice when she spoke.

“Andy, little fool Andy, afraid of his wife
Cooking her beans an' cod, safe on the Cape!

What's *she* done for you? You was dead. I kissed ye to life."—

He laughed, shrilly, and flung back his head to escape
The perilous scent of her flesh, poised like a knife;

But her face was close, her loose hair flew in his eyes.

His limbs grew faint of her nearness, her lips on his cheeks,
The hot forge-flame of her breath and her breathless cries,
Till he sank on her pulsing throat, and, dizzy and weak,
Knew nothing at all but her bosom's fall and rise.

Up thro' the dark the hurricane called the sea,

And the billows shrank and sprang and bellowed and boiled.
The mate whistled, and out from the hatch's lee
Shadows leapt up the shrouds and dizzily toiled;
And the bark eased, but the gale cried terribly.

The Skipper stirred, but he heard not whistle or gale

Tho' the prow plunged deep and flung in his face the foam.
He heard only the sound of footsteps frail

In the sandy yard of his bleak Yarmouth home,
And the creak of a gate and the crunch of the loose beach-trail.

The Skipper stared like a dead man out into space.

"It's her! An' she's white an' her cheeks is wet with the storm.
The gray shawl's over her head an' close to her face
She's holdin' our little baby to keep him warm,
An' she's striding down to the sea wi' ghostly pace."

The storm was loud. His woman drew close his head.

"Baby, Andy, yourself, scared at the wind!"
But the Skipper's voice was thick with a new dread:
"She's gone, gone into the sea! She's gone to find
Me an' you to show us the baby that's dead."

"D'ye hear, d'ye hear? She's gone down into the sea,

An' she'll come an' find us an' make me look in her eyes.
O beast, you! Why couldn't ye leave me be?

I hated ye half the time, but ye hooked me wi' lies,
Till ye had me high an' dry wi' your devilry.

"Let me go, d'ye hear? Christ, how I hate ye! le' go!

They've furred the tops'ls. Not a stitch on her sticks!"

He pushed her down. She kissed him. He struck her a blow.

"Christ! Not to-night I won't tumble to you an' your tricks
Wi' God chasin' me here—an' a ghost below."

He lurched to the wheel, he shouted, and swift thro' the dark

Men climbed, swaying, and labored. The loosed sail roared.

The Skipper steered on, but his boyish face was stark;

And blindly on, like a frightened mare at a ford,

Snorted and plunged and reared the maddened bark.

On! And he heard a footfall under the sea!

On! And the swish of great fins making room!

He saw the sea-floor's desert shadowy,

And he saw her coming, whiter and swifter than doom,

Tho' she moved not her shoulder at all, nor bent her knee.

He saw her pass like a wisp thro' the level sea-weed,

Like a ray of the moon he saw her move over the crag.

Before her he saw undulant arms recede,

Lumps drop to cover, racing fishes lag—

And he shook out canvas to match his speed to her speed.

The sea with shock and thunder broke over the side

And the mast shuddered and yawed and the beams droned.

But the Skipper heard not wind nor bellowing tide,

He heard only a voice that faintly moaned

And close under his feet the steps of his bride.

His hands were no more his own on the plunging wheel

For a stronger soul than his own had taken command.

It turned the rudder, it turned the shivering keel

Till the bark jibed in the clutch of the awful hand,

And the gale broke a sail from its bolts with a loud peal.

The Skipper's light-o'-love clutched, wildly, his arm.

With a curse the mate leapt to the wheel: "The shoal!"

But the Skipper fought free, he feared not the tempest-harm,
He feared only a ghost pursuing his soul
With feet swifter than all the pinions of storm.

And the vessel crashed with shiver and shock on the bar,
And the waves pursuing swept tumbling the deck.
Up the shrouds shadows leapt to a groaning spar;
But over the shoal the storm flung the harried wreck,
And it staggered into the breakers, jar on jar,

Beaten and open-seamed, to the last mad clash!
The Skipper dragged his light-o'-love to the yards.
Shouts, and shouts again, and the mortar's flash,
And in bonfire-light the black shapes of the guards
Coiling again and again the whirring lash!

They drew the Skipper's light-o'-love to the shore,
They drew the seamen safe, but the Skipper alone
Abode the buoy's slow return once more,
Alone with eddying soul and face of stone,
Alone with a voice low thro' the storm's roar:

"Andy, Andy, I'm here! Andy, it's me!
Look up, Andy, look. I've brought you your boy.
He's so pretty, Andy. Why can't ye look up an' see?
Who'd ever ha' guessed, Andy, 't you could destroy
Me an' the babe an' yourself so foolishly?"

The Skipper's flesh crawled, for he felt the touch
Of a hand on his hair and lips' faint press and glow.
"Was she kind to you, Andy? An' did ye love her so much?
She never loved you as I did, Andy, I know.
An' you—you was all too good for the like of such.

"Come to me, Andy. There's nothing for you over there.
An', Andy, the baby an' me are close to you here.
There's nothing for you wi' her only hate an' despair.
But I shall be in your eye, Andy, an' in your ear,
An' in your heart forever an' everywhere."

The Skipper heard, thro' howl and thunder he heard!

But the buoy was nigh and voices called from the beach.

He sprang to the buoy—eternity!—it stirred!

Slowly with groaning rope and the tackle's screech,
Shoreward, darting, plunging like a great bird,

It hurtled. But once more the hollow steep

Rose up with hands, it rose, unearthly, vast.

It hovered above him, gaunt awfulness waiting to leap,

Leapt, broke, thundered, whelmed him at last.

Day came. But the Skipper came not forth from the deep.

THE CASE OF RICHARD MIDDLETON

ROBERT SHAFER

PERHAPS it was only natural that in the beginning I looked at the case of Richard Middleton with suspicion. Being merely an American, I had heard little or nothing of him before his tragic death. After that I began to hear more, but even then I had read practically nothing that he had written. For this reason I felt that I was able to take an unprejudiced view of the rather indiscriminate praise of him that was issuing from the mouths of his friends, and everything that I heard did but add to my suspicion.

Here was a man who had died in the saddest of all ways, and was it not probable that the brilliant promise of his youth had been at the best only partially fulfilled? At any rate, he had never published a single volume, and he was a member of that class which, as Mr. Frank Harris assures us, is the lowest of all classes in England—that is, he was a journalist. In this capacity, it is true, he did achieve publication in various English periodicals; but so, I argued, do innumerable young men who will never deserve anything more than the most ephemeral notice. Besides this, however, I learned that Middleton had a high artistic ideal, and believed that he was fitted for literary achievement far beyond the province of the mere journalist, and that he also held in contempt our propagandists who are masking themselves, not always discreetly, beneath the flimsy covers of the contemporary novel, and behind the asbestos drop-curtains of our modern drama. Admirable though this was of him, did it, I asked myself, mean anything in particular? For it is a notorious fact that every American citizen, actuated by precisely the same motives, always carries an original, hand-made drama, priceless for various reasons, in his left-hand hip-pocket; and yet we do not, at least some of us do not, assert that on account of this fact all American citizens are perked out with the distinctive marks of genius. No, I said, the facts of the case must be that these English friends were filled with a most natural grief at Middleton's untimely death, and out of this grief must have been born