

The "Mary Gloster"

By Joseph Rudyard Kipling (1865 –1936)

1894

I've paid for your sickest fancies; I've humoured your crackedest whim --
Dick, it's your daddy, dying; you've got to listen to him!
Good for a fortnight, am I? The doctor told you? He lied.
I shall go under by morning, and -- Put that nurse outside.
'Never seen death yet, Dickie? Well, now is your time to learn,
And you'll wish you held my record before it comes to your turn.
Not counting the Line and the Foundry, the yards and the village, too,
I've made myself and a million; but I'm damned if I made you.
Master at two-and-twenty, and married at twenty-three --
Ten thousand men on the pay-roll, and forty freighters at sea.
Fifty years between'em, and every year of it fight,
And now I'm Sir Anthony Gloster, dying, a baronite:
For I lunched with his Royal 'Ighness -- what was it the papers had?
"Not the least of our merchant-princes." Dickie, that's me, your dad!
I didn't begin with askings. I took my job and I stuck;
I took the chances they wouldn't, an' now they're calling it luck.
Lord, what boats I've handled -- rotten and leaky and old --
Ran 'em, or -- opened the bilge-cock, precisely as I was told.
Grub that 'ud bind you crazy, and crews that 'ud turn you grey,
And a big fat lump of insurance to cover the risk on the way.
The others they durstn't do it; they said they valued their life
(They've served me since as skippers). I went, and I took my wife.
Over the world I drove 'em, married at twenty-three,
And your mother saving the money and making a man of me.
I was content to be master, but she said there was better behind;
She took the chances I wouldn't, and I followed your mother blind.
She egged me to borrow the money, an' she helped me to clear the loan,
When we bought half-shares in a cheap 'un and hoisted a flag of our own.
Patching and coaling on credit, and living the Lord knew how,
We started the Red Ox freighters -- we've eight-and-thirty now.
And those were the days of clippers, and the freights were clipper-freights,
And we knew we were making our fortune, but she died in Macassar Straits --
By the Little Patemoesters, as you come to the Union Bank --
And we dropped her in fourteen fathom: I pricked it off where she sank.
Owners we were, full owners, and the boat was christened for her,
And she died in the Mary Gloster. My heart; how young we were!
So I went on a spree round Java and well-nigh ran her ashore,
But your mother came and warned me and I would't liquor no more:
Strict I stuck to my business, afraid to stop or I'd think,

Saving the money (she warned me), and letting the other men drink.
And I met M'Cullough in London (I'd saved five 'undred then),
And 'tween us we started the Foundry -- three forges and twenty men.
Cheap repairs for the cheap 'uns. It paid, and the business grew;
For I bought me a steam-lathe patent, and that was a gold mine too.
"Cheaper to build 'em than buy 'em;" I said, but M'Cullough he shied,
And we wasted a year in talking before we moved to the Clyde.
And the Lines were all beginning, and we all of us started fair,
Building our engines like houses and staying the boilers square.
But M'Cullough 'e wanted cabins with marble and maple and all,
And Brussels an' Utrecht velvet, and baths and a Social Hall,
And pipes for closets all over, and cutting the frames too light,
But M'Cullough he died in the Sixties, and ---- Well, I'm dying to-night..
I knew -- I knew what was coming, when we bid on the Byfleet's keel --
They piddled and piffled with iron, I'd given my orders for steel!
Steel and the first expansions. It paid, I tell you, it paid,
When we came with our nine-knot freighters and collared the long-run trade!
And they asked me how I did it; and I gave 'em the Scripture text,
"You keep your light so shining a little in front o' the next!"
They copied all they could follow, but they couldn't copy my mind,
And I left 'em sweating and stealing a year and a half behind.
Then came the armour-contracts, but that was M'Cullough's side;
He was always best in the Foundry, but better, perhaps, he died.
I went through his private papers; the notes was plainer than print;
And I'm no fool to finish if a man'll give me a hint.
(I remember his widow was angry.) So I saw what his drawings meant;
And I started the six-inch rollers, and it paid me sixty per cent.
Sixty per cent with failures, and more than twice we could do,
And a quarter-million to credit, and I saved it all for you!
I thought -- it doesn't matter -- you seemed to favour your ma,
But you're nearer forty than thirty, and I know the kind you are.
Harrer an' Trinity College! I ought to ha' sent you to sea --
But I stood you an education, an' what have you done for me?
The things I knew was proper you wouldn't thank me to give,
And the things I knew was rotten you said was the way to live.
For you muddled with books and pictures, an' china an' etchin's an'fans.
And your rooms at college was beastly -- more like a whore's than a man's;
Till you married that thin-flanked woman, as white and as stale as a bone,
An' she gave you your social nonsense; but where's that kid o' your own?
I've seen your carriages blocking the half o' the Cromwell Road,
But never the doctor's brougham to help the missus unload.
(So there isn't even a grandchild, an' the Gloster family's done.)
Not like your mother, she isn't. She carried her freight each run.
But they died, the pore little beggars! At sea she had 'em -- they died.

Only you, an' you stood it. You haven't stood much beside.
Weak, a liar, and idle, and mean as a collier's whelp
Nosing for scraps in the galley. No help --- my son was no help!
So he gets three 'undred thousand, in trust and the interest paid.
I wouldn't give it you, Dickie -- you see, I made it in trade.
You're saved from soiling your fingers, and if you have no child,
It all comes back to the business. 'Gad, won't your wife be wild!
'Calls and calls in her carriage, her 'andkerchief up to 'er eye:
"Daddy! dear daddy's dyin'!" and doing her best to cry.
Grateful? Oh, yes, I'm grateful, but keep her away from here.
Your mother 'ud never ha' stood 'er, and, anyhow, women are queer.
There's women will say I've married a second time. Not quite!
But give pore Aggie a hundred, and tell her your lawyers'll fight.
She was the best o' the boiling -- you'll meet her before it ends.
I'm in for a row with the mother -- I'll leave you settle my friends.
For a man he must go with a woman, which women don't understand --
Or the sort that say they can see it they aren't the marrying brand.
But I wanted to speak o' your mother that's Lady Gloster still;
I'm going to up and see her, without its hurting the will.
Here! Take your hand off the bell-pull. Five thousand's waiting for you,
If you'll only listen a minute, and do as I bid you do.
They'll try to prove me crazy, and, if you bungle, they can;
And I've only you to trust to! (O God, why ain't it a man?)
There's some waste money on marbles, the same as M'Cullough tried --
Marbles and mausoleums -- but I call that sinful pride.
There's some ship bodies for burial -- we've Pied 'em, soldered and packed,
Down in their wills they wrote it, and nobody called them cracked.
But me -- I've too much money, and people might . . . All my fault:
It come o' hoping for grandsons and buying that Wokin' vault. . . .
I'm sick o' the 'ole dam' business. I'm going back where I came.
Dick, you're the son o' my body, and you'll take charge o' the same!
I want to lie by your mother, ten thousand mile away,
And they'll want to send me to Woking; and that's where you'll earn your pay.
I've thought it out on the quiet, the same as it ought to be done --
Quiet, and decent, and proper -- an' here's your orders, my son.
You know the Line? You don't, though. You write to the Board, and tell
Your father's death has upset you an' you're going to cruise for a spell,
An' you'd like the Mary Glosteter -- I've held her ready for this --
They'll put her in working order and you'll take her out as she is.
Yes, it was money idle when I patched her and laid her aside
(Thank God, I can pay for my fancies!) -- the boat where your mother died,
By the Little Paternosters, as you come to the Union Bank,
We dropped her -- I think I told you -- and I pricked it off where she sank.
['Tiny she looked on the grating -- that oily, treacly sea --]

'Hundred and Eighteen East, remember, and South just Three.
Easy bearings to carry -- Three South-Three to the dot;
But I gave McAndrew a copy in case of dying -- or not.
And so you'll write to McAndrew, he's Chief of the Maori Line
They'll give him leave, if you ask 'em and say it's business o' mine.
I built three boats for the Maoris, an' very well pleased they were,
An I've known Mac since the Fifties, and Mac knew me -- and her.
After the first stroke warned me I sent him the money to keep
Against the time you'd claim it, committin' your dad to the deep;
For you are the son o' my body, and Mac was my oldest friend,
I've never asked 'im to dinner, but he'll see it out to the end.
Stiff-necked Glasgow beggar! I've heard he's prayed for my soul,
But he couldn't lie if you paid him, and he'd starve before he stole.
He'll take the Mary in ballast -- you'll find her a lively ship;
And you'll take Sir Anthony Gloster, that goes on 'is wedding-trip,
Lashed in our old deck-cabin with all three port-holes wide,
The kick o' the screw beneath him and the round blue seas outside!
Sir Anthony Gloster's carriage -- our 'ouse-flag flyin' free --
Ten thousand men on the pay-roll and forty freighters at sea!
He made himself and a million, but this world is a fleetin' show,
And he'll go to the wife of 'is bosom the same as he ought to go --
By the heel of the Paternosters -- there isn't a chance to mistake --
And Mac'll pay you the money as soon as the bubbles break!
Five thousand for six weeks' cruising, the staunchest freighter afloat,
And Mac he'll give you your bonus the minute I'm out o' the boat!
He'll take you round to Macassar, and you'll come back alone;
He knows what I want o' the Mary I'll do what I please with my own.
Your mother 'ud call it wasteful, but I've seven-and-thirty more;
I'll come in my private carriage and bid it wait at the door. . . .
For my son 'e was never a credit: 'e muddled with books and art,
And e' lived on Sir Anthony's money and 'e broke Sir Anthony's heart.
There isn't even a grandchild, and the Gloster family's done --
The only one you left me -- O mother, the only one!
Harrer and Trinity College -- me slavin'early an' late --
An' he thinks I'm dying crazy, and you're in Macassar Strait!
Flesh o' my flesh, my dearie, for ever an' ever amen,
That first stroke come for a warning. I ought to ha' gone to you then.
But -- cheap repairs for a cheap 'un -- the doctor said I'd do.
Mary, why didn't you warn me? I've allus heeded to you,
Excep' -- I know -- about women; but you are a spirit now;
An', wife, they was only women, and I was a man. That's how.
An' a man 'e must go with a woman, as you could not understand;
But I never talked 'em secrets. I paid 'em out o' hand.
Thank Gawd, I can pay for my fancies! Now what's five thousand to me,

For a berth off the Paternosters in the haven where I would be?
I believe in the Resurrection, if I read my Bible plain,
But I wouldn't trust 'em at Wokin'; we're safer at sea again.
For the heart it shall go with the treasure -- go down to the sea in ships.
I'm sick of the hired women. I'll kiss my girl on her lips!
I'll be content with my fountain. I'll drink from my own well,
And the wife of my youth shall charm me -- an'the rest can go to Hell!
(Dickie, *he* will, that's certain.) I'll lie in our standin'-bed,
An' Mac'll take her in ballast -- an' she trims best by the head. . . .
Down by the head an' sinkin', her fires are drawn and cold,
And the water's splashin' hollow on the skin of the empty hold --
Churning an' choking and chuckling, quiet and scummy and dark --
Full to her lower hatches and risin' steady. Hark!
That was the after-bulkhead. . . . She's flooded from stem to stern. . . .
'Never seen death yet, Dickie? . . . Well, now is your time to learn!

Additional items of interest may be viewed at:
<http://www.capeanshipmodelersguild.org/Books.htm>