RUDYARD KIPLING

Harp Song of the Dane Women¹

What is a woman that you forsake her,
And the hearth fire and the home acre,
To go with the old gray Widow-maker?

She² has no house to lay a guest in—
But one chill bed for all to rest in,
That the pale suns and the stray bergs nest in.

She has no strong white arms to fold you,
But the ten-times-fingerling weed to hold you—
Out on the rocks where the tide has rolled you.

Yet, when the signs of summer thicken,
And the ice breaks, and the birch buds quicken,
Yearly you turn from our side, and sicken—

Sicken again for the shouts and the slaughters.
You steal away to the lapping waters,
And look at your ship in her winter quarters.

You forget our mirth, and talk at the tables,
The kine³ in the shed and the horse in the stables—
To pitch her sides and go over her cables.

Then you drive out where the storm clouds swallow,
And the sound of your oar blades, falling hollow,
Is all we have left through the months to follow.

Ah, what is Woman that you forsake her,
And the hearth fire and the home acre,
To go with the old gray Widow-maker?

1906

¹ From *Puck of Pook’s Hill*, a book of stories about England in early times.
² The sea.
³ Cows.