

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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Ballad of the Yarmouth Castle

Ballad of the Yarmouth Castle
(Attributed to Gordon Lightfoot)

Well, it's four o'clock in the afternoon
And the anchors have been weighed
From Miami to Nassau,
She's bound across the waves

She'll be headin' south through Biscayne Bay
Into the open sea
Yarmouth Castle, she's a-dyin' and don't know it

Now the many years she's been to sea
She's seen the better times
She gives a groan of protest
As they cast away her lines

And the grumble of her engines
And the rust along her spine
Tells the Castle she's too old to be sailin'

But the sands run out within her heart
A tiny spark glows red
It smoulders through the evening
There's laughter overhead

Now the men are served, and the cards are dealt
And the drinks are passed around
Deep within the fire starts a-burnin'

Now it's midnight on the open sea
And the moon is shining bright
Some people join the party
And others say good-night

There's many who are sleeping now
It's been a busy day
And a tiny wisp of smoke is a-risin'

"Oh Lord," she groans, "I'm burning!"
"Let someone understand!"
But her silent plea is wasted
In the playin' of the band

Everybody's dancin' on her deck
And they're havin' such a time
Then a voice says
"Shut up and deal, I'm losin'"

Deep within the Yarmouth Castle
The fire begins to glow
It leaps into the hallways
And climbs and twists and grows

And the paint she wore to keep her young
Oh Lord, how well it burns
And soon that old fire is a-ragin'

Up beneath the bridge it's climbin' fast
the captain stands aloft
He calls up to the boatswain, 'n' says
"Boatswain, we are lost"

For the ragged hoses in the racks
No pressure do they hold
And the people down below
Will soon be dyin'

All amidships, oh she's blazin' now
It's spreadin' fore and aft
The people are a-scramblin'
As the fire blocks their path

The evil smoke surrounds them,
And they're fallin' in their tracks
And the captain in his lifeboat is a-leavin'

Oh then the ship, Bahama Star
Comes steamin' through the night
She sees the Castle blazin'
And 'tis a terrible sight

"Jump down, jump down!" the captain cries
"We'll save you if we can!"
Then the paint on his funnels is a-fryin'

"God help the ones who sleep below
And cannot find the way!
Thank God for those we've rescued
Upon this awful day."

Now the heroes, they are many,
But the times are growin' slim

And now from stern to bow
She's a-blazin'

Oh the Yarmouth Castle's moanin'
She's cryin' like a child.
You can hear her if you listen
Above the roar so wild

Is she cryin' for the ones who lie
Within her molten sides?
Or cryin' for herself, I'm a-wonderin'

But the livin' soon were rescued
The ones who lived to tell
From the Star they watched her
As she died there in the swells

Like a toy ship on a mill pond
She burned all through the night
Then slipped 'neath the waves
In the mornin'

(sung by Gordon Lightfoot on Sunday Concert Plus)

The Yarmouth Castle was an aging cruise ship that burned badly in the Bahamas in 1965. 90 people died in the fire.

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