

Ballad of the Great Eastern

Sting

In 18 hundred and 59, the engineer Brunel,
Would build the greatest ship afloat, and rule the ocean's swell.
Nineteen thousand tons of steel they used to shape the mighty keel,
Forged inside the smelter where they made the gates of Hell...
And the name upon the contract, Isambard Brunel.

As day-by-day the monster grew, the engineer Brunel,
Would watch the devil's handiwork, and woe betide a man who shirks,
Or slows the pace to build the keel, nineteen thousand tons of steel,
Anyone with eyes to see is but a bride of Hell,
And the name upon the draftsman's chart, Isambard Brunel.

A riveter was on the hull with his apprentice lad,
He'd served his time with the older man, some say it was his dad.
200 men upon the shift but when the day is done,
The count is hundred 98...before the setting sun,
They searched the yard all through the night until the morning bell,
No more delays are countenanced by Isambard Brunel,
And so they work a double shift, to make the time in full,
No mention of the missing men...they seal the double hull.

The ship was launched upon the tide and all the townsfolk cheered,
A brass band played but not a word of omens they had feared,
But before the afternoon was out, the celebration wrecked,
A dignitary clutched his heart...and collapsed upon the deck.
No doctors could revive him as the telegraphs would tell,
And the name upon the coffin...Isambard Brunel.

And now upon the open sea, the mighty ship did plough,
But many feared the darkness, in the shadow of its prow.
An explosion on the lower deck, would take the souls of five,
With a growing superstition 'mong the sailors still alive.

The captain and his boy are lost while rowing to the shore,
The crew will threaten mutiny and say they'll work no more,
They began to say the ship was cursed, they hadn't even seen the worst,
They'd signed on able-bodied men, but they wouldn't sail to Hell...
When the name upon the manifest is Isambard Brunel.

For 14 years that ship will sail, misfortune taken hard,
The owners barely find a crew to reach the breakers' yard.
And as they take the plates apart, unseal the double hull,
The breakers call the foreman o'er, they'd found a human skull.
And then they find the younger man, perforced to understand,
That in the hour of their torment, he'd reached his father's hand.

In 18 hundred and 59, the engineer Brunel,
Would build the greatest ship afloat, and rule the mighty swell.
The final shift was over, and the breakers' hammers fell,
And the name upon the manifest, the contract signed in Hell,
Was the same as on the draftsman's chart...one Isambard Brunel.