

Borrow George

# Signelil, A Tale from the Cornish, and Other Ballads



George Borrow

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## Signelil, A Tale from the Cornish, and Other Ballads

### SIGNELIL

The Lady her handmaid to questioning took:  
“Why dost thou so sickly and colourless look?”  
*But sorrow gnaws so sorely!*

“Tis little wonder if sickly I’m growing,  
*Malfred my lady!*  
So much am I busied with cutting and sewing.”

“Erewhile was thy cheek as the blooming rose red,  
But now thou art pale, even pale as the dead.”

“To conceal the truth longer ’tis vain to essay,  
My gallant young master has led me astray.”

“And if the young noble has led thee astray,  
Say, what gave he thee for thy virtue in pay?”

“He gave to me shoes were gold spangled all o’er,  
And them have I worn with affliction so sore.

“He gave to me also of silk a soft shift,  
And with sorrow most painful I’ve worn the fair gift.

“He gave me, Christ sain him! a gold ring so fine,  
Whose match I can see on no finger of thine.”

“But what will avail thee his presents of price,  
If he thee will not wed before God and men’s eyes?”

“O, he to espouse me so often has vowed,  
And rich presents beside upon me has bestowed.”

“What will his vows help thee in secrecy spoke?  
To many a maid them he has made and has broke.”

“O, I on the gold harp will play me a tune,  
And the knight to his presence will summon me soon.”

With her fingers so tapering she struck the first chord,

That heard, as he dozed in his bed, the young lord.

The gallant young lord to his waiting-boy said:  
“Go straight, and call hither my mother’s fair maid.”

The bedside he stroked with so gentle an air:  
“Dear heart, sit thee down, for thy weight it will bear.”

“O no, by the Saints, I will never do that,  
For there, noble Sir, I have ne’er before sat.”

“Though thou ne’er hast placed thee upon my bedside,  
Thou hast slept in my arms embraced many a tide.

“My spouse thou shalt be, yea, my heart’s beloved spouse,  
And I in thine arms every night will repose.”

## A TALE FROM THE CORNISH

In Lavan's parish once of yore,  
Dwelt on the spot called Tshei an Hor,  
A loving couple, man and wife,  
But poverty distressed their life.  
And thus the man his wife address'd:  
"I'll wander forth of work in quest;  
And you, my dearest, you can earn  
Your living here till I return."

His home he leaves, and, far from gay,  
Towards the East he took his way.  
At length a farmer's dwelling reaching,  
He enter'd it, for work beseeching.  
"What work canst do?" the farmer cried;  
"All kinds of work, Sir," John replied.  
Then straight they for a year agree,  
Three pounds the wages were to be.

And when the year to end had come  
The master paid him down the sum.  
"John," said his master, "here's your fee;  
But if you'll it return to me,  
A point of wisdom I will teach you."  
Said John: "Give it me, I beseech you."  
"No, no, to give is not my way."  
"Take it," said John, "and say your say."  
Quoth t'other: "This in memory hold:  
*Ne'er for the new road leave the old.*"

They for another year agree,  
The wages just the same to be;  
And when the year its end had reached,  
The farmer forth the three pounds fetched.  
"John," said his master, "here's your fee,  
But if you'll it return to me,  
A point of wisdom I will teach you."  
"Give it me, Sir, I do beseech you."  
"For nought I will not speak, not I."  
"Well, take it then," was John's reply.  
Quoth t'other: "*Lodge not, for your life,  
With an old man who's a young wife.*"

For yet a year they then agree,  
The wages still the same to be.  
And when the year to end had roll'd,

The three pounds out the master told.  
“John,” said the master, “here’s your fee;  
But if you’ll it return to me,  
I’ll the best point of wisdom learn you.”  
“For that, Sir, I’ll the wage return you.”  
The farmer said: “*Take this advice,  
Ere striking once, bethink thee twice.*”

Now John would serve no longer there,  
Home to his wife he would repair.  
“Go not to-day,” the farmer spake,

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