



They chained me fast in sight of land,  
On a stark, unkindly coast ;  
They set a torch within my hand  
To guide the homing host.  
In torment of the harrying tide,  
A-fret at my anchor chain,  
While shark-tooth reefs behind me hide,  
I front the hostile main ;  
But jeopardy of reef and sea  
Are perils lightly borne—  
My chief distress is loneliness,  
Unspeakable, forlorn.

When summer days are calm and clear,  
And the sea is bare of sail,  
My fate seems hardest and most drear,  
My life of least avail.  
The distant surf-boom all the day  
Sings, siren-like, of land,  
The gossip sea-breeze talks away  
Of some enchanted strand.  
With roll and dip, an idle ship,  
I wait the long day's end  
Through hours so dull the glancing gull  
Is welcomed as a friend.

But when the blinding norther blows,  
With icy, inky rains,  
A sense of service through me glows  
To recompense my pains.  
I hear the groping liner scream  
Her menace through the night,  
And I cleave the dark with sudden gleam  
To set the wanderer right.  
The liner prays for friendly bays ;  
My prayer is quickly told—  
That the great hawse-chain may bear the strain  
And the mushroom anchor hold.

If the chain hold fast till night-clouds fly  
And the norther's strength be spent,  
At morn the ships go curtsying by  
To every continent ;  
The crawling, blunt-bowed freighter,  
The liner tall and lean,  
To all the world to cater,  
They ply the ports between.  
Man and his prize of merchandise  
They bear to every goal,  
And I can see their scorn of me,  
Poor idler of the shoal.

I let my fettered heart aspire  
To romance of far seas ;  
To phosphorous-gleaming wakes of fire  
And spicy tropic breeze.  
My soul is filled with wonder  
Of what the traveller meets  
Across the world and under,  
In babble of strange streets.  
Though bounden slave to those who brave  
The treacherous ocean's ire,  
The free ship brings a hint of things  
That quickens my desire.

An ocean outpost shunned and lone,  
Poor thing misnamed a ship,  
The venturing argosies have flown  
Beneath the horizon's dip ;  
While I am fuming at my chain  
They will come bravely back,  
Some with a rich, a goodly gain,  
Some with a loss, alack !  
But though they be in the utmost sea,  
At a sail's most distant flight,  
They are more near to the harbor pier  
Than I at my chain to-night.

I am not built for beauty,  
With the speed-line's splendid grace ;  
My port is the port of Duty,  
My place to keep my place ;  
To smother all desire,  
To conquer all regret,  
To wait and never tire,  
To watch and ne'er forget ;  
To be forgot when the storm is not,  
And shunned when the storm is high,  
And to see the barque I saved in the dark  
In the day go heedless by.