Rasinberry Lane

with bounce (d = 116)

There was a little girl in Rasinberry Lane:
The sailor one
day he chanced for to stray;
Being wet and weary he
hung down his head. Now, it's home, dearest, home; home we ought to
be. Home, dearest, home, in the old counteree. The ash and the
The maid being bashful, she answered him no.

The nicest little girl that you ever did see.
The sailor one day he chanced for to stray;
Being wet and weary, he hung down his head.
He called for a candle to light himself to bed,
To light him to bed as he used for to do;
To light him to bed as he used for to do,
And he said, "Pretty fair maid, won't you come too?"

Chorus:
Now it's home, dearest, home; home we ought to be.
Home, dearest, home, in the old counteree.
The ash and the oak and the bonny maple tree,
They are all growing green in the old counteree.

The maid being bashful, she answered him no.
Two handfuls of gold in her apron he did throw,
Saying, "This to you, my pretty fair maid, oh this to you I give
If you promise to love me as long as you live."
She, like a foolish girl, thinking it no harm,
Jumped into bed for to keep the sailor warm,
Now what they done there I will never tell you here,
But they wished that the night was as long as a year.

From the singing of LaRena Clark.
Collected by Edith Fowke, Aug. 1964
Transcribed by Peggy Seeger
Early next morning the sailor he arose,
Hands in his pockets a-counting out his dough,
Saying, "Take this, my darling, for what you've said and done,
Leaving you a little daughter, perhaps a little son.
If it be a daughter, she can stay at home with thee;
If it be a son, you can send him out to sea.
With bell-bottomed pants and a suit of navy blue
He can climb the navy must like his daddy used to do.

This tale of a sailor and a fair maid, originally known as "Rosemary Lane," has long been popular both on shore and at sea, but the number of published versions is somewhat scanty because, as Miss Dean-Smith noted, "The text of 'Rosemary Lane' was considered too indecent for collections offered to the public at the turn of the century."

The ballad has taken several fairly distinct forms. Between 1893 and 1913 English collectors noted it half a dozen times in two forms: as a straight ballad without a refrain, usually beginning "When I was in service in Rosemary Lane"; and also with the "oak and ash" refrain, usually called "Home, Dearie, Home," and beginning with the young sailor asking for "a candle to light him to bed." The refrain was borrowed from an old Northumberland song, "The North Country Maid," which told of the maid's homesickness when she left her home to go down to London, and at sea English tars crossed the two to create a song telling of a sailor's longing to see his wife and baby. In this widely known form, the only similarity to the "Rosemary Lane" ballad is a stanza telling how the baby will grow up to be a sailor like his dad. But seamen also continued to sing something closer to the original, which developed into the form known as "Bell-Bottomed Trousers."

Mrs. Clark's version, which came from her Granddad Watson, is unusual because of its double stanza form, and because it combined the old "Rosemary Lane" opening with the "oak and ash" refrain. The first reported British version of "Rosemary Lane" published in the Journal of the Folk Song Society in 1918 has five four-line stanzas of which all but stanza 4 compare roughly to lines in Mrs. Clark's version. Several other English versions contain a number of stanzas that compare closely, including the rather rare reference to throwing gold into her apron, but none arranges the lines in just this way.

The refrain always follows much the same pattern, but there are many variations in the trees named. "The oak and the ash and the bonny ellum tree" is common; another has "the ivy and the oak and the bonny willow tree"; and this Ontario version brings in the maple tree to give it a Canadian touch.


Edith Fowke