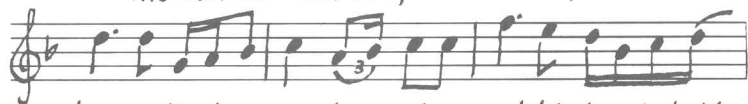


The Sailor's Bride



The sun was setting in the west, All nature



had retired to rest As a sailor and his lovely bride



stood weeping by the water-side.

The sun was setting in the west,
All nature had retired to rest
As a sailor and his lovely bride
Stood weeping by the waterside.

"It's scarce six months since we were wed.
Alas, how swift those moments fled!
And now we must part by the dawn of the day,
And the proud ship bears my love away."

The storm came on before its time,
The snow fell hissing on the brine,
And the sailor lad so brave and true
Was carried away in the waters blue.

"Willie, I wish I was with you
Beneath the waves of the ocean blue.
My soul to God, my body in the sea,
And the dark blue waves rolling over me.
My soul to God, my body in the sea,
And the mermaids weeping over me."

The last two melody lines are repeated for the extra two lines in the final verse.

Sung by O.J. Abbott, Hull, Quebec.

Collected by Edith Fowke, April 1960. Transcribed by Gordon Sheard.

Many collectors have found this haunting lament in the United States, but Kenneth Peacock has published the only previous Canadian version. In *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* he gives it as "Early Spring" (p. 439), noting that "This Newfoundland variant of 'The Young Bride's Lament' is one of the most poignant lyrics in traditional English verse." Charlotte Decker sang his version in 1958; she had learned it from her mother seventy-five years earlier when she was six years old. That takes it back to 1883, about the same time that Mr. Abbott learned it in the Ontario lumberwoods.

In *The New Green Mountain Songster* (p. 231) Phillips Barry notes that “‘The Sailor’s Bride’ was first printed without music by H. DeMarsan on a broadside, at some time between 1860 and 1878” and that it “is constructed, both as to text and melody of leftover material which may be traced back through related songs to the close of the seventeenth century.” In *Folk Songs of the South*, J.H. Cox gives two West Virginia texts from 1916 and writes: “This is ‘The Sailor Boy’s Bride,’ broadside DeMarsan, list 15, no. 90.” One of his texts came from a woman who “obtained it from her mother, who learned it from her mother,” carrying it well back into the nineteenth century. *North Carolina Folklore* (p. 344) has two texts, one titled “My Solider Boy” from a manuscript of 1879, and the other, titled “Charlie and Mary,” from tradition in 1922. Vance Randolph gives two Missouri texts in *Ozark Folksongs* (III, p. 268), titled “My Lovely Sailor Boy” and “The Sailor Lad.” Mary Eddy has two in *Ballads and Songs of Ohio* (p. 104), titled “The Sailor Boy” and “The Sailor Lad.”

In *Body, Boots, and Britches* Harold V. Thompson writes: “I think that the most touching song of separation which I have collected from the tradition of sailors is ‘The Sailor and His Bride,’ favorite of the late Captain Hiram Beldin who for years was master of a tug-boat on Lake Champlain.” His version was “written out on a paper yellowed with time and dated August 1, [18]58.” That indicates the song was in oral tradition before the DeMarsan broadside cited by Barry. Further evidence is “The Sailor’s Wife’s Lament” included in *A Pioneer Songster: Texts from the Stevens-Douglass manuscript of Western New York, 1841-1856*, edited by Harold W. Thompson and Edith E. Cutting (p. 67).

Most of the published texts have five stanzas and a nonsense refrain made up of two lines of nonsense syllables and a repetition of the two lines of the preceding verse. The older versions have six or seven stanzas without a refrain. This suggests that the texts with the refrain stem from the DeMarsan broadside; the others from oral tradition.

There is a remarkable amount of variation in the texts, again emphasizing their status in oral tradition. One interesting point is that every version includes stanzas like Mr. Abbott’s second and fourth while there is no such consistency in the other stanzas.

Mr. Abbott’s text is shorter than most, but it is one of the most poetic. His reference to “the snow fell hissing in the brine” does not occur elsewhere; and his last two lines add a poetic touch superior to other texts. Some of the older ones refer to mermaids in a form like: “The mermaids are at the bottom of the sea / A-weeping there sad tears for me.”

G.M. Laws’ *American Ballads from British Broadside*s lists most of the references mentioned (p. 145), except for Peacock and *A Pioneer Songster*. In *North Carolina Folklore* Belden and Hudson cite another North Carolina text in *Folk-Songs of Roanoke and the Albemarle* by Louis W. Chappell (p. 57), and an Indiana version in *Hoosier Folklore* (V, p. 21).

Edith Fowke