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Twas in one summer season, the twentieth of May,
We hoisted our English colours and we did make for sea.
The sun did shine moat glorious. To Lisbon we were bound.
The hills and dales were covered with pretty maids all round.

I spied a handsome sailor, just in his blooming years,
A-riding to his own true love with many melting tears,
A-riding to his own true love, to let her understand,
That he was going to leave her, bound for some foreign land.

“The king has sent for seamen, and I for one must go,
Through France, proud Spain and Florida, to fight the daring foe.”
“Those words you speak, dear Willie, will surely break my heart,
Excepting we get married, this night before we part.”

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“The king has sent for seamen and I for one must go,
And for my very life, my love, I dare not answer no,”
“O stay at home dear Willie, and I will be your wife,
For the parting with you Willie, is the parting of my life.”

“But if I was to stay at home, another would take my place
And that would be a shame for me, likewise a great disgrace.”
“My yellow hair I will cut off, and on you I will wait ,
Let the winds blow high or low love, and the seas be e'erⁱ so great.”

“Thy waist it is too slender love, thy fingers are too small,
Your constitution is too weak to face the cannon ball,
Where cannon loudly rattle and bullets nimbly fly,
And silver trumpets they do sound to drown the dying's cry.”

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“My yellow hair I will cut off, men's clothing I'll put on,
No storms or danger do I fear, let the winds blow high or low,”
“But if I should see some pretty girl, all bonny, brisk and gay,
And were to place my mind on her, what would my Nancy say!”

“What would I say, dear Willie, why I should love her too.
And I would gently step aside while she'd be pleasing you.”
“Those words you say dear Nancy, will surely break my heart,
Excepting we get married this night and never part.”

This happy young couple got married and crossed o'erⁱⁱ the main
We'll wish them health and happiness till they return again.

Finis

There are several retellings of the story of Nancy and Willie. Most retellings keep with the theme of a man named William, is sent to war. His mistress, Nancy is upset and decides that she wants to dress like a man to accompany William on his travels. William agrees, they get married and go off to war together. Retrieved from: <http://www.mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=153172>.



Notes

- i. e'er: meaning *ever*.
- ii. o'er: meaning *over*.