

A SAILOR'S LIFE (traditional Arkansas)

I learned this from the singing of William Harrison Burnette, an Ozarks singer. It is another of the songs Julie Henigan introduced me to.

A sailor's life is a dreary life
It draws fair maidens with their heart's delight
It causes them to weep and mourn
For the sake of a true love who'll never return.

Dark is the color of my true love's hair
His cheek is of the lily fair
And on his breast he wears a star
None can I love but my sweet sailor boy

Father, dear Father, go build me a boat
Out on the ocean I will float
Every ship that I pass by
There will I enquire for my sweet sailor boy

Out on the ocean she did float
There she passed about their boat
She hailed the captain as he sailed by
And of him she did enquire for her sweet sailor boy

“No, my dear, he is not here.
He's been dead five months or more.
Near a rocky island as we sailed by
There we had to leave your sweet sailor boy.”

She pulled her boat upon a rock
Just like a lady with her heart 'most broke.
She wrung her hands and tore her hair
Just like a lady in deep despair.

“Bring me a chair to sit upon,
Bring pen and ink to write a song.”
At the end of every line she dropped a tear;
At the end of every verse she cried, “Oh my dear!”

“Dig my grave both wide and deep
Place marbles at my head and feet,
And on my breast, a snow white dove
To show to the world, I died for love.”
And on my breast, a snow white dove
To show to the world, I died for love.”

*For a good time, listen to the Wisconsin River raftsman version of this story that Art Thieme sings. It is called “The Pinery Boy” on his 1986 Folk-Legacy recording **On the Wilderness Road**.*

From Judy Cook's CD “Far From The Lowlands”

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