

Well Met, Well Met

As sung by
Pearl Jacobs Borusky
08-30-1940 Antigo, WI

Well Met, Well Met, My Old True Love

Well met, well met, my old true love. Well met, well met said
he. 'I have just re-turned from the salt salt sea; and 'twas
all for the sake of thee, and 'twas all for the sake of thee."

The image shows a handwritten musical score on aged paper. It features three staves of music in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The melody is simple and folk-like. The lyrics are written in cursive below the notes. The title 'Well Met, Well Met, My Old True Love' is written at the top of the first staff.

(lyrics to Version B, sung by Dan Tanner)

Verse 1.

Oh I've just returned from the salt, salt sea,
My true love for to see
And she was married to a ship carpenter
And a jolly little lad was he, was he,
And a jolly little lad was he.

Verse 2.

"Oh if you will forsake your ship carpenter
And go along with me
I will take you to a spot where the grass
grows green
On the banks of a sweet valley, valley,
On the banks of a sweet valley."

Verse 3.

"Oh if I should forsake my ship carpenter
And go along with thee
What have you, sir, for to maintain me
Or to keep me from slavery, ery,
Or to keep me from slavery?"

Verse 4.

"Oh I've seven ships all in the port
And seven more at sea
Four hundred twenty sailor boys
And they're all for to wait on me, on me,
And they're all for to wait on me.

Verse 5.

Then she took her babes upon her knee
And gave them kissed three
Saying, "Stay at home, you dear little ones,
For to keep your pa's company, oh-ny,
For to keep your pa's company."

Verse 6.

Oh she had not been on board two weeks,
I'm sure it was not three
When she was sitting by her cabin door
And she wept most bitterly, oh'ly,
And she wept most bitterly.

Verse 7.
“Oh is it for gold you weep,
Or is it for fear
Or is it for the ship carpenter
That you left when you came on here, on
here,
That you left when you came on here?”

Verse 9.
Oh she had not been on board three weeks,
I’m sure it was not four
When she threw her body overboard
And her weeping was heard no more, no
more,
And her weeping was heard no more.

Verse 8.
“Oh it is not for gold I weep,
Nor is it for fear
But it is for the two little ones
That I left when I came on here, on here,
That I left when I came on here.”

Transcription and lyrics from the Helene Stratman-Thomas Collection.

Critical Commentary

Transcriptions by Treat, no. 48, Peters, p. 109, and HST

In the Professional Papers series:

(The House Carpenter) (Daemon Lover) (James Harris) Child 243

Sung by Mrs. Pearl Jacobs Borusky, age 39, Antigo, 1940.

American variants have been collected in the southern states of North and South Carolina, Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee, Virginia (52 versions), West Virginia (21 versions). In the middle west it has been collected in Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin.

The title Daemon Lover has lost its significance in the American versions; there are few lines that can be construed to indicate that the seaman returned in the form of an evil spirit.

Well met, my old true love has been sung for at least three generations in this singer’s family. Mrs. Borusky learned the song from her mother Mrs. Ollie Jacobs, who had in turn learned it from her mother in Kentucky. A few slight verbal changes and melodic embellishment distinguish Mrs. Borusky’s singing of the song from the way her mother sang it for Asher Treat in 1933 and again in 1938. Both sing my “old” true love. Most collected variants have my “own” true love.

The above song consists of thirteen verses, Mrs. Borusky says that there is still another which is missing.

Version B “The Ship’s Carpenter” sung by Dan Tanner, age 8-?, 1941. [editor’s note: elsewhere, HST records that Dan Tanner was 75 years old.]

Melody and text taken down from a recording made by Mr. Tanner’s nephew Paul Curtis.

Editor’s notes:

Gardner and Chickering note the relationship to Child no. 243, “The Daemon Lover” (Gardner and Chickering 54), and Randolph writes that a song called “James Harris, or the Daemon Lover” was published “in several seventeenth-century manuscripts” (Randolph 166). The related song, “The House Carpenter,” was first published as a broadside in New York in the 1850s by J. Andrews; Flanders thus claims that specifying the sailor’s rival as a “house carpenter” is a

“distinctively American” version of the ballad (Flanders 96). Borusky’s version fits this category, as her third verse states: “For I am married to a house carpenter.” In some other versions, the man she runs away with turns into a demon once they are on the boat.

Alternate titles/related songs: “The Banks of Claudy,” “The Faithless Wife,” “Little Closet Door,” “My Own True Love,” “On the Banks of the Sweet Willie,” “Said an Old True Love,” “The Salt, Salt Sea,” “The Salt Water Sea,” “The Sea Captain; Sweet Wilder,” “A Warning for Married Women,” “Young Turtle Dove,” “Fair Janie,” “The King’s Daughter,” “Nice Young Man,” “Sweet William,” “Well Met, We’re Met, We’re Met,” “The Young Ship’s Carpenter,” “House Carpenter,” “Daemon Lover,” “James Harris, or the Daemon Lover.”

Sources:

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K.G.