

Pretty Polly Oliver

As sung by
Eryl Levers

07-26-1946 Madison, WI

As pret - ty Pol-ly O - li-ver lay mus - ing in bed A com - i - cal
6 fan - cy came in to her head No fa - ther no mo - ther _ shall _ make me a
12 fool I live for a sol - dier and fol - low him my love

Verse 1.

As pretty Polly Oliver lay musing in bed
A comical fancy came into her head:
"No father no mother shall make me a fool
I live for a soldier and follow him my love."

Verse 2.

And as she sat sighing beside his cold corpse
The general rode up to her riding on a white horse,
Then Polly up and said to him no mortal afraid:
"Oh sir I'm no soldier boy, I'm nothing but a maid."

Critical Commentary

Editor's notes:

This song is very different from Lily Richmond's "Pretty Polly." Levers' version is a ballad, which tells the story of a girl dressing up as a man to find her lost soldier lover. Levers does not include as many verses as some of the sources below, but she fills in the gaps between her verses in the recording by stopping singing and telling the story. Gardener and Chickering write that this was "a popular English broadside song" (167). Linscott states further that the origin was Irish before it moved to England: "After the suppression of the Insurrection of 1798, many Irish airs were carried back to England, and this soldiers' song was one of them" (Linscott 273).

Alternate titles: "Pretty Polly," "O Pretty Polly," "Polly Oliver."

Sources:

Gardner, Emelyn Elizabeth, and Geraldine Jencks Chickering, colls. and eds. *Ballads and Songs of Southern Michigan*. Hatboro, Pa.: Folklore Associates, 1967. Reprinted from original, c1939. Text only.

Linscott, Eloise Hubbard, coll. and ed. *Folk Songs of Old New England*. New York: Macmillan Co., 1939. "Polly Oliver."

Wier, Albert E. *The Book of a Thousand Songs: The World's Largest Collection of the Songs of the People, Containing More than a Thousand Old and New Favorites*. New York: Mumil Publishing: 1918.

"O Pretty Polly" first half nearly identical, second half different.