

The Handsome Cabin Boy



1. It's of a pretty female as you will understand
Her mind was set on rambling into a foreign land
She dressed herself in sailor's clothes and to the docks did steer
And she signed with a captain to serve him for a year.
2. The captain's wife she being on board, she seemed in great joy
To think that the captain had engaged such a handsome cabin boy
And often times she'd slip him a kiss and she would have liked to toy
But 'twas the captain found out the secret of the handsome cabin boy.
3. Whose cheeks they were like roses and her hair hung all in curls
The sailors often smiled and said that he looked just like a girl
But eating of the captain's biscuits her color did destroy
And the waist did swell on pretty Nell, the handsome cabin boy.
4. 'Twas round the Bay of Biscay our gallant ship did plough
One night among the sailors there was a hell of a flurry and row
It tumbled the men from out their hammocks, their sleep it did destroy
Terrible curses and a-moaning of the handsome cabin boy.

5. "O doctor, dearest doctor", the cabin boy did cry,
"My time has come, I am undone, and I must surely die".
The doctor came a-running and a-smiling at the fun
For to think a sailor lad should have a daughter or a son.
6. Now when the sailors heard the news, they all did gape and stare
The child belonged to none of them, they solemnly did swear.
The captain's wife, she said to him "My dear I wish you joy
For tis either you or I have betrayed the handsome cabin boy."
7. So, sailors take your tot of rum and drink success to trade
And likewise to the cabin boy who was neither a man nor a maid
Here's hoping the wars don't rise again, us sailors to destroy
And here's hoping for a jolly lot more like the handsome cabin boy.

"The Handsome Cabin Boy", also known as "The Female Cabin Boy" is a ballad that is popular in all parts of Britain. Cecil Sharp noted a version in Somerset in 1905; Ord printed a version in his **Scottish Bothy Ballads**. The theme of the female sailor or soldier is a common one in folk song.

It has been recorded by Ewan MacColl, A.L. Lloyd, Martin Carthy, Louis Killen, Roberts and Barrand, Garcia and Grisman, and Cyril Tawney among others. These lyrics are from the A.L. Lloyd recording. I think I learned it from the Roberts and Barrand recording **Mellow with Ale From the Horn (1975)**.