

# Ballad: The Bumboat Woman's Story

In "The Bumboat Woman's Story," an elderly woman reminisces about her youthful days at sea and her affection for Lieutenant Belaye, a naval officer. Once thriving in her sixties, known for her charm and beloved by the Royal Fleet for her lively eyes, she provided for the ships in Portsmouth Bay, including the HOT CROSS BUN commanded by the kind-hearted Lieutenant Belaye. The lieutenant, skilled in maximizing the prestige of his small gunboat, deceives casual inquiry by conflating its tonnage with the number of guns, implying a grandeur far beyond its modest capacity. Their relationship blossoms below decks, amid tales of sea battles and affectionate nicknames, fostering a love that Peak could hardly resist.

When Belaye was ordered to sail to the German Sea, it devastated the local maidens, none more so than our bumboat woman, who stealthily joined his crew under the guise of a man, seeking to stay close to her heart's desire. Aboard the gunboat, she noted the unseamanlike qualities of the crew—well-mannered to a fault, inept in the face of duty, and prone to sea sickness, yet they share a unique camaraderie under Belaye's indulgent command. Despite their lack of naval prowess, they were united in their genteel nature, a rarity among the rough seas.

The narrative weaves humor and heartache, illustrating the woman's cunning in securing her place on the voyage and her observations of the crew's peculiarities—from their aversion to hard labor to the secret enhancements of their appearances. The ballad progresses, recounting the daily life on board the HOT CROSS BUN, marked by the Lieutenant's proud but ineffectual use of his single gun, and the crew's gentle demeanor starkly contrasted against conventional sailor behavior. Through storms and stillness, the woman remains by Belaye's side until a fateful leave separates them, perhaps to reunite after a long week apart, leaving readers to ponder the conclusion of this sea-faring tale.

This narrative captures the essence of maritime life through the lens of a love-lorn woman disguised as a sailor, creating a vivid tableau of naval adventures, romantic ambition, and the enduring human spirit amidst the vast and unpredictable sea.

