

# Folk Song: The Golden Vanity

"The Golden Vanity" is a traditional folk song from the 17th century that tells the story of a brave young cabin boy aboard a great ship. The song has gone by many names over the years, and is sometimes called "The Sweet Trinity," which is the name of the ship in several versions. However, the earliest known title, dating back to 1625, was "Sir Walter Raleigh Sailing in the Lowlands." These variations are because the song has been passed down through singing rather than being written by one known author, which is common with folk songs. Over time, the words and details changed as sailors and musicians shared it in different places, and it grew with each person who sang it.

The song is set during the age of sailing ships, when European nations sent vessels across the oceans for trade, exploration, and war. In the lyrics, an enemy ship threatens the Golden Vanity, and a cabin boy offers to save his ship by swimming out and boring holes in the enemy's hull. The captain (Sir Walter Raleigh, in some versions) agrees with this plan and promises him his daughter's hand in marriage and a large sum of money in return. The endings of the song diverge from here: the boy upholds his end of the bargain and successfully sinks the enemy ship, but either is not allowed to marry the daughter of the captain, or is not allowed back on board his ship at all, and sinks into the sea.

"The Golden Vanity" likely began as a sea ballad sung by sailors while working on ships. Songs like this helped pass the time, kept a steady rhythm for labor, and allowed sailors to share stories of bravery and hardship. Although the tale may not be historically true, it captures the spirit of life at sea during the Age of Exploration, when ships were central to travel, trade, and discovery. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, folk song collectors wrote down versions of "The Golden Vanity," and several musicians recorded their takes on it so that it would not be lost. Thanks to these efforts, listeners today are able to get a glimpse into the lives of early sailors and better understand what it was like during a time when exploring the oceans shaped history.

# The Golden Vanity Lyrics

There once was a gallant ship that sailed the lowland sea  
The name of the ship was the Golden Vanity  
One day we were hunted by the Turkish Revelry  
To sink her in the lowland, lowland, low  
Sink her in the lowland sea

Lowland, lowland  
Sink her in the lowland sea  
(Repeat)

Well up spoke the cabin boy a gallant heart, had he  
"Tell me Captain, what is it that you will give to me  
If I were to swim up to the Turkish Revelry  
And sink her in the lowland, lowland, low  
Sink her in the lowland sea?"

(Lowland, lowland  
Sink her in the lowland sea  
(Repeat)

"Well if you were to sink her, if you were to be so bold  
I will give you riches and my daughter's hand to hold  
You will live in wedded bliss until you both grow old"  
So sink her in the lowland, lowland, low  
Sink her in the lowland sea

Lowland, lowland  
Sink her in the lowland sea  
(Repeat)

Well he tied a bowline round his waist and jumped into the sea  
And he swam with all his might to the Turkish Revelry  
Drilled six holes into a hull and then another three  
To sink her in the lowland, lowland, low  
Sink her in the lowland sea

Lowland, lowland  
Sink her in the lowland sea  
(Repeat)

Well he tied a bowline round his waist and jumped into the sea  
And he swam with all his might to the Turkish Revelry  
Drilled six holes into a hull and then another three  
To sink her in the lowland, lowland, low  
Sink her in the lowland sea

Lowland, lowland  
Sink her in the lowland sea  
(Repeat)

Well the cabin boy swam back to us so hoist me up, he cried  
But the cold, cruel captain left him clinging to the side  
"A cabin boy won't ever take my daughter as a bride  
I'd rather sink her in the lowland, lowland, low  
Sink her in the lowland sea"

(Lowland, lowland  
Sink her in the lowland sea  
(Repeat)

Since you won't save me, captain, I will curse your wicked soul  
I'll take this tool and with it I will drill nine perfect holes  
And soon we'll all be swimming in the seaweed in the shoals  
As I sink her in the lowland, lowland, low  
Sink her in the lowland sea

Lowland, lowland  
Sink her in the lowland sea  
(Repeat)

# The Golden Vanity

The image displays a musical score for the piece "The Golden Vanity". It consists of four staves of music, all written in treble clef. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and the time signature is 2/4. The notation includes various rhythmic values such as quarter notes, eighth notes, and sixteenth notes, along with rests and phrasing slurs. The piece concludes with a double bar line on the fourth staff.