

W. S. Gilbert (1836-1911)

8 *The Yarn of the "Nancy Bell"*

'Twas on the shores that round our coast  
From Deal to Ramsgate span,  
That I found alone on a piece of stone  
An elderly naval man.

His hair was weedy, his beard was long, 5  
And weedy and long was he,  
And I heard this wight on the shore recite,  
In a singular minor key:

"Oh, I am a cook and a captain bold,  
And the mate of the *Nancy* brig, 10  
And a bo'sun tight, and a midshipmite,  
And the crew of the captain's gig."

And he shook his fists and he tore his hair,  
Till I really felt afraid,  
For I couldn't help thinking the man had been drinking, 15  
And so I simply said:

"Oh, elderly man, it's little I know,  
Of the duties of men of the sea,  
And I'll eat my hand if I understand  
How you can possibly be 20

"At once a cook, and a captain bold,  
And the mate of the *Nancy* brig,  
And a bo'sun tight and a midshipmite,  
And the crew of the captain's gig."

Then he gave a hitch to his trousers, which 25  
Is a trick all seamen larn,  
And having got rid of a thumping quid,  
He spun this painful yarn:

"'Twas in the good ship *Nancy Bell*

That we sailed to the Indian sea, 30  
And there on a reef we come to grief,  
Which has often occurred to me.  
“And pretty nigh all o’ the crew was drowned  
(There was seventy-seven o’ soul)  
And only ten of the *Nancy’s* men 35  
Said ‘Here!’ to the muster roll.

“There was me and the cook and the captain bold,  
And the mate of the *Nancy* brig,  
And the bo’sun tight and a midshipmite,  
And the crew of the captain’s gig. 40

“For a month we’d neither wittles nor drink,  
Till a-hungry we did feel,  
So, we drewed a lot, and, accordin’ shot,  
The captain for our meal.

“The next lot fell to the *Nancy’s* mate, 45  
And a delicate dish he made;  
Then our appetite with the midshipmite  
We seven survivors stayed.

“And then we murdered the bo’sun tight,  
And he much resembled pig; 50  
Then we wittled free, did the cook and me,  
On the crew of the captain’s gig.

“Then only the cook and me was left,  
And the delicate question, ‘Which  
Of us two goes to the kettle?’ arose, 55  
And we argued it out as sich.

“For I loved that cook as a brother, I did,  
And the cook he worshipped me;  
But we’d both be blowed if we’d either be stowed  
In the other chap’s hold, you see. 60

“‘I’ll be eat if you dines off me,’ says TOM,  
‘Yes, that,’ says I, ‘you’ll be,’ —  
‘I’m boiled if I die, my friend,’ quoth I,  
And ‘Exactly so,’ quoth he.

“Says he, ‘Dear JAMES, to murder me  
Were a foolish thing to do,  
For don’t you see that you can’t cook *me*,  
While I can — and will — cook *you!*’

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“So, he boils the water, and takes the salt  
And the pepper in proportions true  
(Which he never forgot) and some chopped shalot,  
And some sage and parsley too.

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“Come here,’ says he, with a proper pride,  
Which his smiling features tell,  
‘Twill soothing be if I let you see,  
How extremely nice you’ll smell.’

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“And he stirred it round and round and round,  
And he sniffed at the foaming broth;  
When I ups with his heels, and smothers his squeals  
In the scum of the boiling broth.

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“And I eat that cook in a week or less,  
And — as I eating be  
The last of his chops, why I almost drops,  
For a wessel in sight I see.

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“And I never grieve, and I never smile,  
And I never larf nor play,  
But I sit and croak, and a single joke  
I have — which is to say:

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“Oh, I am a cook and a captain bold,  
And the mate of the *Nancy* brig,  
And a bo’sun tight, and a midshipmite,  
And the crew of the captain’s gig!”

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1866

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