

Sweet Mary Starbuck

I married John Coffin just two years ago
And he's a fine man, as all Nantucket knows
And he's bound to make second mate, or so I hear
If the *Charles* brings home enough oil next year

At twenty a mother, at nineteen a bride
With a child on my knee and another inside
My heart it was broken, and swept out to sea
Where my sweet Mary found it and brought it to me

Chorus:

*Sweet Mary Starbuck from Nantucket town
If she were the sea I would willingly drown
And her voice like a bell on a clear winter's day
Sets my heart a-ringing and winging away*

At meeting one morning she came to me there
With the Nantucket wind in her flyaway hair
Her hand, soft and certain, clasped mine in the lane
And I felt my heart shiver when she spoke my name

Her words came in whispers, in trembling lines
Her cheeks red as roses, her eyes all a-shine
Then she kissed me so gently, so soft and so sure
The world spun round once, and at once I was hers

Chorus

On Nantucket our men go to hunt for the whale
And they live at the mercy of teeth, sea, and gale
But in town life goes on, and it goes on apace
With children, and letters, and Mary's sweet face

So when John comes I'll give him a kiss and a smile
And a good whaleman's wife I will be for a while
And in time I'll stand watching his sail fade at sea
Then go home where my true love lies waiting for me

Chorus

Composed by: Alex Sturbaum

Appears on *Loomings*

I wanted there to be more explicitly LGBTQ songs in the folk tradition (after all, we've always been around), and while reading Nathaniel Philbrick's "In the Heart of the Sea", it occurred to me that whaler's wives had to sometimes fall in love.