

Sailor's (Wife's) Story
Dorothea Cooper

I am a servant and a sailor's widow

I am Dorothea Cooper, a servant in the Robert family, here in Mastic, New York. I have two little girls, Charlotte and Fanny. Their father, Bill, wed me in 1806 but ran away to sea a couple of years past. He wrote me to say that he was forced into the British navy. He wanted papers that would free him. Before I could get these, his ship ran aground and the crew was lost – alas.



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I am told amazing news!

This spring comes a letter for me from a New York Senator. Mrs. Robert reads it and tells me my Bill is still alive! He fled the English ship before it sank, and is now in *our* Navy, on board *Constitution*. He says he will come home as soon as his navy service ends. But still he doesn't send me nothing for Charlotte and Fanny, the drunken waster!



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Dorothea Cooper left the Robert household in 1825. She married twice more, and lived to at least the age of 63.

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Bill dies once more often than most men

My joy at learning that my beloved husband was alive did not last long. A few short months later I heard he had perished in a battle with the British ship, *Java*. So I was once more a widow. But young Daniel Robert (who I raised like my own son) trained as a lawyer. In 1819 he proved Bill and I were wed, and this won me the pay Bill was owed, and a navy pension!

*Extract from the Danish Newspaper of the
31st Dec. 1811.*

" We have received accounts that the English ship *St. George*, of 98 guns, commanded by Admiral Reynolds, and the *Defence* of 74 Capt. David Atkins, were driven ashore on the morning of the 24th inst. near Cape Ryssestien, in the Lordship of Rinkiobing. The crew of the former is said to have consisted of 850 men, and of the latter, of 550 men, not including the officers. Half an hour after the *Defence* had touched the ground, the whole went to pieces, and all the crew (excepting five seamen and one marine, who saved themselves by holding pieces of timber) were drowned. Captain