

Barbara Ellen (traditional Kentucky)

From Cecil Sharp & Maude Karpeles' 80 Appalachian FolkSongs. Collected from Mr. Bin Henson at Barbourville, KY. Text from the singing of Miss Carrie Howard at Pineville, KY

O down in London, where I was raised;
Down where I got my learning
I fell in love with a pretty little girl.
Her name was Barbary Ellen.

He courted her for seven long years.
She said she would not have him.
Pretty William went home and he took down sick.
And he sent for Barbary Ellen.

He wrote her a letter on his death bed.
He wrote it slow and moving.
“Go take this to my pretty little love,
And tell her I am dying.”

They took it to his pretty little love.
She read it slow and mourning.
“Go take this back to my pretty little love,
And tell him I am coming.”

As she walked on to his bedside,
Says “Young man, young man, you’re dying.”
He turned his pale face to the wall,
And he bursted out a-crying.

He stretched his lily-white hand to her,
“Oh come and tell me ‘Howdy’,
“Oh no, oh no, oh no,” said she.
And she would not go about him.

Do you remember last Saturday night
‘Twas at my father’s dwelling
You passed the drink to the ladies all around
And you slighted Barb’ry Ellen

O yes, I remember last Saturday night
Down at your father’s dwelling
I passed the drink to the ladies all around
And my heart to Barbr’y Ellen
And my heart to Barbr’y Ellen

As she walked down those long stair steps,
She heard some death bells ringing.
And every bell did seem to say,
“Hard hearted Barbary Ellen.
Hard hearted Barbary Ellen.”

As she walked down that shady lane,
She heard some birds a-singing.
And every bird did seem to say,
“Hard hearted Barbary Ellen.
Hard hearted Barbary Ellen.”

As she walked out the very next day,
She saw his corpse a comin’
“Come set him down, Oh set him down,
That I may look upon him.”

The more she looked, the worse she felt.
Til she bursted out a-crying,
“I once could have saved pretty William’s life,
But I would not go about him.”

“Oh Mother, oh Mother, go make my bed.
And make it soft and narrow.
Pretty William has died for pure, pure love,
And I shall die for sorrow.”

And Father, oh Father, go dig my grave.
And dig it deep and narrow.
Pretty William has died for me today,
And I shall die tomorrow.”

A rose grew out from William’s grave.
From Barbary Ellen’s, a brier.
And they grew and they grew to the top of the church.
Til they could grow no higher.

They grew and they grew to the top of the church.
Til they could grow no higher
And there they tied a true love’s knot.
And the rose grew round the brier.

From Judy Cook’s CD “If You Sing Songs...”

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