

## SWEET WILLIAM (traditional Virginia)

*There is an old tradition that calling someone's name in extreme situations is disastrous to them. When Fair Ellen calls Sweet William's name in the 7<sup>th</sup> verse, it causes him to receive his death wound.*

'Twas in the merry, merry month of May  
When the meadows looked fresh and gay  
He hung his bugles 'round about his neck  
And he went riding away.

He rode 'til he came to fair Ellen's home  
He knocked and he tingled at the ring  
"Asleep or awake, dear Ellen," I said,  
"Pray arise, and let me in."

Fair Ellen arose, and slipped on her clothes  
To let sweet William in.  
No one was so ready as fair Ellen herself  
To arise and let him in.

He mounted her upon his milk white steed,  
Himself on the iron grey  
He hung his bugles 'round about his neck  
And they went riding away.

They rode 'til they came in three miles of the place.  
They stopped and they looked all around.  
They looked, and they saw some seven armed men  
Come hasting over the ground.

"Get you down, fair Ellen," I said,  
And take my steed in hand  
'Til I go back to yonders spring  
And stop those seven armed men."

She stood 'til she saw her six brothers fall.  
Her father fell so near.  
"Sweet William," I said, "come and stop your case  
For you seem almost too severe."

She took a handkerchief from her side  
'Twas made of linen so fine.  
She took and she wiped his bleeding, bleeding  
wounds,  
For the blood ran as red as any wine.

Then he mounted her upon his milk white steed,  
Himself on the iron grey  
He hung his bugles 'round about his neck  
And they went riding away.

They rode 'til they came to his mother's home  
He knocked and he tingled at the ring.  
"Asleep or awake, dear Mother," I said,  
"Come arise and let me in."

His mother arose, and slipped on her clothes  
To let sweet William in.  
No one was so ready as his mother herself  
To arise and let him in.

"Dear Mother," I said, "come bind up my head.  
You never shall bind it any more."  
Sweet William he died from the wounds that he  
bore,  
And Fair Ellen, she died also.

*This version of Earl Brand (Child ballad #7) is from the singing of Fields Ward, Galax, VA. Andy Cohen and Julie Henigan introduced me to this song and Mr. Ward's singing of it.*

### From Judy Cook's CD "Far From The Lowlands"

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