

“If Ever I Return”

1. Fear an Bháta (The Boatman)

Chorus:

***Fhir an bháta 'sna hóró éile, Fhir an bháta 'sna hóró éile
Fhir an bháta 'sna hóró éile, Mo shoraid slán leat gach áit a dtéid thú***

Théid mé suas ar an chnoic is airde
Feach an bhfeic mé fear an bháta,
An dtig thú anoch nó an dtig thú amárach
No muna dtig thú idir is trua atá mé

Ta mo chroíse briste brúite
Is trick na deora a rith bho mo shúileann.
An dtig thú inniu nó am bidh mé dúil leat
Nó an druid mé an doras le osna thuirseach?

Thúg mé gael duit is chan fhéad mé 'athrú
Cha gaol bliana is cha gaol raithe
Ach gaol ó thoiseacht nuair bha mé 'mo pháiste
Is nach seasc a choíche me gus clóigh' am bás mé

Translation from Irish Gaelic to English

Chorus:

***O, Boatman, and another, "horo"
My safe blessing with you everywhere you go***

I went up on the highest hill
To see if I could see the boatman
Will you come tonight or will you come tomorrow?
If you do not come, I will be wretched

My heart is broken and crushed
Frequent are the tears that run from my eyes
Will you come today or when I'm longing for you
Or shall I close the door with a tired sigh?

I gave you my love, and I cannot change that
Not love for a year, and not just words of love
But love from the beginning, when I was a child
And I will never cease, even when my death bell tolls

Words: traditional Irish; Music: Connie Dover

The words to this song of unrequited love come from the north of Ireland. "Fear an Bhata" is also widely sung throughout Scotland, where its original music and lyrics were first published in Henry Whyte's collection, The Celtic Lyre (Edinburgh, 1898).

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2. Lady Keith's Lament

I may sit in my wee old house at the spinning wheel to toil so dreary
I may think on a day that is gone, and sigh and sob till I grow weary
I ne'er could brook, I ne'er could brook a for-eign king to own or flat-ter
And I will sing a ranting song the day our King comes o'er the water

I have seen the good old day, the day of pride and chieftain's glory
When royal Stuart held the sway and none heard tell of Whig or Tory
Though silver be my hair one day, and age has struck me down, what matter
I'll dance and sing that happy day, the day our King comes o'er the water

If I live to see the day that I have begged and begged from heaven
I'll fling my rock and reel away, and dance and sing from morn till evening
For there is One I will not name who comes the beingin bike to scatter
And I'll put on my bridal gown the day our King comes o'er the water

A curse on dull and drawling Whig, the whining, ranting, low deceiver
With heart so black and lies so big, the canting tongue of clishmaclaver
My father was a good lord's son, my mother was an earl's daughter
And I'll be Lady Keith again, the day our King comes o'er the water

Traditional Scottish

"Lady Keith's Lament" was published in 1819 in James Hogg's collection, The Jacobite Relics of Scotland, being the Songs, Airs and Legends of the House of Stuart, and appeared under the title "When the King Comes O'er the Water."

The Jacobites were partisans of Scotland's ruling family, the Stuarts, who, by 1603 sat on both the English and Scottish thrones, and who were ultimately deposed. This song was either composed by or written in behalf of the daughter of the Earl of Perth, whose maiden name was Lady Mary Drummond, and who was strongly attached to the Stuart clan. That she looks for her king's return and her country's salvation with the eager anticipation of a bride awaiting her groom is typical of the romantic view many Scots held of the exiled Stuart kings.

Clishmaclaver: Idle Gossip

Beingin bike: Refers to the growth of the Whig (short for Whiggamore) party, which advocated English Commonwealth rule in Scotland.

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3. Peggy and the Soldier

Come all ye lads of high renown, let me tell of a fair young maiden
As she arose one summer's morn, just to watch the soldiers parading
They looked so bold and they marched so gay, their banners flying as the band did play
It caused lovely Peggy to smile and say, I will go with my gallant soldier

She watched the soldiers to and fro as they were at their leisure
Then Peggy to herself did say, "At last I've found my treasure
But oh, how cruel my parents can be, to banish my darling so far from me
I will leave them all and I'll go with thee, my brave undaunted soldier

Oh, Peggy dear, the soldier said, I pray don't act so unruly
For when I'm in some foreign land, believe me you'll rue it surely
What if in battle I should fall from the shot of an angry canon ball
And you so far from your Daddy's hall, are you wise with your gallant soldier?

I have fifty guineas in safe store, likewise a heart that's bolder
I will give it all to the lad I adore, my brave undaunted soldier
So don't say no, but let me go, and together we'll face the fiercest foe
And pray kind Providence should know of Peggy and her gallant soldier

And when he saw she was so true, he could not stay hardhearted
He said, My darling, I'll marry you, and none but death shall part us
And when we're in some foreign land, I'll guard you, my darling, with my right hand
And pray that God a friend might stand to Peggy and her gallant soldier

Traditional Irish

This song of true love between a young woman and the soldier she fancies probably originated during the Napoleonic wars, when wives and mistresses literally followed their men onto battlefields throughout Europe. Also known as "Mary and the Soldier," I learned this song from Scottish singer, Davy Steele, who first heard it sung in Ireland at the Mourne Bar, in Derry. The Mourne Bar was well known for its great traditional music sessions, and was a popular gathering place for local musicians. Sadly, in the 1980's it was destroyed by a bomb.

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4. Ned of the Hill

Translation from Irish Gaelic:

Oh, who is that outside with anger in his voice
Beating on my closed door?
I am Eamann of the Hill, soaked through and wet
From constant walking of mountains and glens.

Oh, who is without, that in anger they should
Keep beating my bolted door?
I am Ned of the Hill, long weary and chill
From long trudging over marsh and moor.

My love, fond and true, what else could I do
But shield you from wind and from weather,
When the shot falls like hail, they us both shall assail,
And mayhap we will die together.

Through frost and through snow, tired and hunted I go,
In fear both of friend & of neighbor
My horses run wild, my acres untilled,
And all of it lost to my labor.

What grieves me far more than the loss of my store
Is there's no one would shield me from danger,
So my fate it must be to bid farewell to thee,
And languish amid strangers.

My darling, my beloved,
We will go off together for a while
To forests of fragrant fruit trees,
And the blackbird in his nest,
The deer and the buck calling,
Sweet little birds singing on branches,
And the little cuckoo on top of the green yew tree;
Forever, forever, death will not come near us
In the middle of our fragrant forest.

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5. The Holland Handkerchief

A wealthy squire lived in this town
He was a man of high renown
He had a daughter of beauty bright
And the name he called her was his heart's delight

And many's the young man to court her came
But none of them could her favor gain
Till there came one of the low degree
And above them all she did fancy he

But when her father he came to know
Their lovely daughter loved this young man so
Over fifty miles he sent her away
All to deprive her of her wedding day

One night as she lay in her bedroom
Her love appeared from out the gloom
He kissed her lips and to her did say
Arise my darling and come away

With this young man she got on behind
And they rode swifter than any wind
They rode on for an hour or more
Till he cried my darling, my head feels sore

A holland handkerchief she then took out
And with it wrapped his aching head about
She kissed his lips and to him did say
My love you are colder than any clay

When they arrived at her father's gate
He cried get down, love the hour is late
Get down, get down love and go to bed
And I'll see this noble horse is groomed and fed

When she arrived at her father's hall,
Who's there, who's there, her own father called
It is I dear father, you sent for me
My love was the messenger was sent by thee

Oh no my daughter, that ne'er can be
Your words are false and you lie to me
For on yon far mountain your true love lies
And in yon green graveyard his body lies

The truth then dawned on this maiden brave
And with her friends she exposed the grave
Where lay her love although nine months dead
With a holland handkerchief around his head

Traditional Irish

I learned "The Holland Handkerchief", considered to be one of the "big ballads," from the great singer, Cathal McConnell, of County Fermanagh, Ireland. Holland, as referred to here, is plain woven linen fabric.

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6. La Fontaine (The Fountain)

Au borde d'une fontaine je me suis reposée
Je me suis reposée au bord d'une fontaine
Au bord d'une je me suis reposée
Et l'eau était si claire que je me suis baignée

Et l'eau était si clair que je me suis baignée
Je me suis baignée et l'eau était si claire
L'eau était si claire que je me suis baignée
Avec des feuilles de chêne je me suis essuyée

Dessus la plus haute branche le rossignol chantaite
La rossignol chantaite dessus la plus haute branche
Dessus la plus haute branche la rossignol chantaite
Chante, belle rossignol, et toi a le coeur gai

Oui, je l'attends, je l'attends
Je l'attends que mon coeur aime
Oui, je l'attends, je l'attends
Je l'attends celle que mon coeur aime tant

Jean, mon ami, a la guerre et allé
A la guerre et allé Jean, mon ami
Jean, mon ami, a la guerre et allé
Pour un bouton de rose que je lui refusaiw

Je voudrais que la rose fut encore en rosier
Encore en rosier je voudrais la rose
Je voudrais que la rose fut encore en rosier
Et que mon ami, Jean, fut ici à m'aimer

**Words: traditional French,
Adapted by Connie Dover
Music: Connie Dover**

The words to this song can be traced to 1704, when they were published in Christopher Ballard's Brunettes et Petits Airs Tendre, under the title "A La Claire Fontaine." I have blended verses from Normandy and the islands of Guernsey and Jersey to create this version, for which I have composed a new melody. My source for all of the lyrics is Peter Kennedy's wonderful collection, Folksongs of Britain and Ireland.

Translation from French to English

By the side of a fountain I took my rest
And the water was so clear that I bathed in it

The water was so clear that I bathed in it
And I dried myself with the leaves of an oak tree

From the very topmost branch, the nightingale was singing
Sing on, pretty nightingale, you are the one who has a happy heart

John, my friend, to the war has gone
Because of a rosebud which I refused from him

Yes, I will wait, I will wait, I will wait
I will wait for the one my heart loves
Yes, I will wait, I will wait, I will wait
I will wait for the one my heart loves so much.

I wish that the rose were still on the bush
And my friend John were here to love me

By the side of a fountain I took my rest
And the water was so clear that I bathed in it

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7. Mally Leigh

When Mally Leigh came down the street, a wind blew mightily
And flew the hat and cloak and all from bonny Mally Leigh

And down along the Canongate were lads of all degree
Who sighed to see the comely shape of bonny Mally Leigh

Chorus

***And we're all gone East and West, we're all gone, aye, ajee
We're all gone East and West, a-courting Mally Leigh***

She wore two ribbons in her hair that flaunted gallantly
And ribbons at the back and breast of bonny Mally Leigh

And with every bob her ribbons made, each lad thought, That's for me
But ne'er a one was in the thoughts of bonny Mally Leigh

And when she reached the palace porch, there stood lairdies three
And each one turned him round about to glance on Mally Leigh

The dance went through the palace hall, a comely sight to see
And none was there so bright and fair as bonny Mally Leigh

The Prince came out from among them all with garters at his knee
And danced a stately minuet with bonny Mally Leigh

Though some wore jewels in their hair that shown so brilliantly
Yet, Mallie did surpass them all with a red and rosie cheek

But Hieland Brodie floored them all with a proud and glancing eye
He's won for aye the heart and hand of bonny Mally Leigh

Traditional Scottish; words adapted by Connie Dover

In his collection, Vagabond Songs and Ballads of Scotland (Glasgow, 1904), Robert Ford connects this song to Mrs. Mally Sleigh, who in 1725 was married to Lord Lyon Brodie. She was a celebrated Scottish beauty, and is depicted here strolling down an Edinburgh street. To go ajee means to lose one's bearing, or go off to one side, a reference to the state of confusion produced by this lady's charms.

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8. Who Will Comfort Me

The darkness now is lifting
Dawn blushes in the sky
It lays a spread of gold and red
And breathes a lullaby
To a thousand quiet creatures
Of earth and sky and stream
Who cannot know that paradise
Will one day be a dream

When the last wagon rolls along
And fades into the West
And cuts a trail of progress
Through a singing skylark's nest
When the last woodland creature
Lifts her head to flee
And is snared by her protector
Lord, who will set her free?

Chorus:

***When the boundless spirit has no place to roam
The heart will sadly whisper this world is not my home
When the sweep of wind along the grass bows down to destiny
When the last bright star has fallen Lord, who will comfort me?***

When the last prairie flower
Gives up her yellow bloom
When the high cathedral skies
Give way to crowded rooms
When we parcel heaven
And fence eternity
When the wildness is all tamed and torn
Don't let me live to see

When the last campfire flickers
And is laid to righteous rest
When the Ones who wandered without fear
Are cursed who once were blessed
When all our deeds of glory
Are laid in front of Thee
When you ask what man hath wrought
Don't rest Your gaze on me

Words: Connie Dover

Music adapted from "The Way West" by Brian Keane (Brian Keane Music, ASCAP)

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9. Shady Grove

Peaches in the summertime
Apples in the fall
If I can't have the one I love
I won't have none at all

Chorus:

***Shady Grove, my little love
Shady Grove, my darling
Shady Grove, my little love
I'm going back to Harlan***

Cheeks as red as the blooming rose
Eyes of the prettiest brown
You are the darling of my heart
Love me when the sun goes down

Fly around, my pretty little dove
Fly around, my daisy
Fly around, my pretty little love
About to drive me crazy

Some come here to fiddle and dance
Some come here to tarry
Some come here to fiddle and dance
I come here to marry

Traditional American

This lively song comes from the Appalachian Mountains, and its melody is also a popular old-time fiddle tune. Many thanks to Linda Faris, of Weston, Missouri, for teaching me the words. The town of Harlan is in the southeastern corner of Kentucky, at the confluence of the three forks of the Cumberland River.

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10. Miss Lillian Williams – Instrumental

*Original composition by Connie Dover
in honor of her paternal grandmother, Lillian Williams Dover*

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11. How Can I Live at the Top of the Mountain

How can I live at the top of the mountain
With no money in my pocket and no gold for to count it?
But I would let the money go all for to please her fancy
And I would marry no one but my bonnie blue-eyed lassie

She's my bonnie blue-eyed lassie with an air so sweet and tender
Her walk, like a swan that floats, and her waist so small and slender
Her golden hair in ringlets fell all on her snow-white shoulders
And I'd ask her for to marry me, and there's no one could be bolder

Some people say that she is very low in station
And other people say she'll be the cause of my ruination,
But let them all say what they will, to me she will prove constant still
Till the day that I die she will be my own lovely lady

Lightly swims the swan o'er the clear and flowing water
And blithely sings the nightingale, so happy to behold her
The winds do blow, the moorcocks crow, the moon, it shines so deeply
But deeper by far is my love for my own lady

Traditional Irish