

# Kitty Wells

As sung by  
Lester Coffee  
08-20-1946 Harvard, IL

KITTY WELLS

You ask what makes this dar-ky weep And why, like ot~~h~~ers, am not  
gay; What makes the tears roll down my cheek From  
ear-ly morn til close of day. My sto-ry, dar-ky, you shall  
hear, For in my mem-ory fresh it dwells. T'will  
cause you all to shed a tear On the grave of my sweet Kit-ty  
*Refrain*  
Wells. The birds were sing-ing in the morn-ing. The  
myrtle and the i-vy were in bloom. The sun on the hill-top was a-  
shin-ing. It was then we laid her in the tomb.

## Verse 1.

You ask what makes this darky weep  
And why, like others, am not gay,  
What makes the tears roll down my cheek  
From early morn til close of day.  
My story, darky, you shall hear,  
For in my memory fresh it dwells.  
'Twill cause you all to shed a tear  
On the grave of my sweet Kitty Wells.

## Refrain.

The birds were singing in the morning.  
The myrtle and the ivy were in bloom.  
The sun on the hill-top was a-shining.  
It was there we laid her in the tomb.

Verse 2.

I never shall forget the day  
When we together roamed the dells.  
I kissed her cheek and named the day  
That I should marry Kitty Wells.  
But dath came to my cabin door  
And took from me my joy and pride,  
And when I found she was no more  
I laid my banjo down and cried,

Verse 3.

I often wish that I were dead  
And laid beside her in the tomb.  
The sorrow that bows down my head  
Is deeper than the midnight doom.  
Springtime has no charm for me  
Though flowers are blooming in the dells,  
For that bright form I cannot see  
Is the form of my sweet Kitty Wells.

*Transcription and lyrics from the Helene Stratman-Thomas Collection.*

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## Critical Commentary

Transcription by Peters, p. 125, and HST.

### HST notes:

In the Professional Papers series:  
*Lester A. Coffee. Very old song.*

### Editor's notes:

This song was a popular minstrel song, whose authorship has been credited variously to Charles E. Atherton in 1858, T. Brigham Bishop in 1861 (billed as “the only correct and authorized edition”), and Thomas Sloan Jr. in 1860 (McNeil 167).

### Sources:

Garson, Eugenia comp. and ed. *The Laura Ingalls Wilder Songbook*. Arranged by Herbert Haufrecht. New York: Harper and Row, 1968.  
McNeil, W.K., ed. *Southern Folk Ballads*, vol. 2. The American Folklore Series, ed. W.K. McNeil. Little Rock: August House Publishers, 1987.  
Morris, Alton C., ed. *Folksongs of Florida*. Transcriptions by Leonhard Deutsch. Gainseville: University of Florida Press, 1950. text only, very similar.  
Peters, Harry B., ed. *Folk Songs out of Wisconsin: An Illustrated Compendium of Words and Music*. Madison, WI: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1977.

K.G.