

TRANSCRIPTION

Duncan Williamson sings “The Broken Token”

ScottishVoicesProj.0531

[This recording was made in the sitting room of a rented house in Auchtermuchty, Fife, in August of 1986. Present were Duncan Williamson, John Niles, and half a dozen members of Niles’s research group. Not transcribed here are a few initial words that refer back to the song that Williamson sang just before this one. The previous song had a lively chorus, and those present were hard put to keep from singing along, though what was aimed for on this occasion were good recordings of Duncan’s voice alone.]

DW: I want to sing a song for Donna.¹ I’ve never done a special request for Donna here yet, so I’d like to do a special request. It tells the story about a young sailor. This is for you [*looking right at Donna.*]. And he leaves his young lover an he goes off to sea. But before he goes, he takes a ring from his finger, an he breaks it in two. An he gives her one half, an he keeps his half. He says, “You keep this, and should I ever return, we’ll put the two halves together, an you and I will be together forever.” She says, “That is fine.” [*Clears throat and sings:*]

- 1 A pretty fair maid walking in her garden
 When a handsome sailor came walking by.
 And as he viewed her he stepped up to her—
 Sayin, “Fair you maid, would you fancy I?”
- 2 She said, “To fancy you, sir, it would not do, sir,
 For I have a lover of my own.
 And he's but a true and a faithful sailor
 And seven long years, now, since he's been gone.
- 3 But seven long years makes no alteration.
 Another seven I'll wait for him.
 And if he is wed, sure, I wish him happy.
 And if he's dead, sure, I wish him well.”
- 4 He said, “Do you see that big cas-tle up yonder?
 And do you see all those lilies bright?
 I will but give you its gold and silver,
 If you will be my true love tonight.”
- 5 She said, “What do I care for your gold and silver?
 Oh, what do I care for your lilies bright?
 Oh, what do I care for your cas-tle up yonder?
 If my own true lover was here tonight.”

¹ Donna Chang, one of the members of the research team.

- 6 So he put his hand all into his pocket.
 His fingers were so genteel and small.
 He brought out the ring that was broke between them,
 And when she saw it, she down did fall.
- 7 He picked her up all into his arrums,
 He gave her kisses one and two.
 Sayin, "I am your true and your faithful sailor,
 And I've come home, dear, to marry you."

DW: That's called "The Broken Token." It's a wonderful wee story.

DC: The broken what?

DW: "The Broken Token." It's a wonderful wee story.

JN: Thank you, Duncan.

DW = Duncan Williamson

DC = Donna Chang

JN = John Niles

Appendix

What follows is a select transcription of Williamson singing this song on a different occasion, as recorded in October 1987 in Ithaca NY (Niles tape 87DW13). The words and tune are much the same.

JN: Well, these are good songs, I like to hear them. I like to hear the stories, as well. You mentioned "Pretty Fair Maid in the Garden" as one of your favorites as well.

DW: I'll sing it to you, all right. It has a good story, that's why it's important, because it tells a great story. [*Sings:*]

- 1 A pretty fair maid walking in her garden
 When a handsome sailor comes walking by.
 And as he viewed her he stepped up to her—
 Saying, "Fair young maid, would you fancy I?"
- 2 "To fancy you, sir, it would not do, sir
 For I have a lover of my own.
 And he's but a true and a faithful sailor

And seven long years, now, since he's been gone.

- 3 But seven long years makes no alteration.
Another seven I'll wait for him.
And if he is wed, sure, I wish him happy.
And if he's dead, sure, I wish him rest.”
- 4 He said, “Do you see that big cas-tle up yonder?
And do you see all those lilies white?
I will but give you its gold and silver,
If you will be my true love tonight.”
- 5 She said, “What do I care for your gold and silver?
What do I care for your lilies white?
Oh, what do I care for your castle up yonder?
If my own true lover was here tonight.”
- 6 He put his hand all into his pocket.
His fingers were so gentle and small.
He brought out a ring that was broke between them,
And when she saw it, she down did fall.
- 7 He picked her up all into his arrums,
He gave her kisses one and two.
Saying, “I am your true and your faithful sailor,
And I've come home, dear, to marry you.”

DW: That's a good story.

JN: That's very good, very good.

DW: Yeah. That's — in Child that's known as “The Broken Token.”²

JN: “Broken Token,” that's right.

DW: That's what Linda says, yeah.

JN: That's right, “The Broken Token,” “The Broken Ring.”

DW: Yeah, that's what Linda says, that's what Linda says. I've never looked it up — I don't know his version of it, but that's the way I was taught it.

JN: It's a bit like, ah, the ring in “Hind Horn.” Makes me think of that as well.

² “In Child”: actually the song is not one of the 305 ballads anthologized by Francis James Child. It is an English song of relatively recent date, one that circulated widely as a broadside in former years.

DW: Well, that's what Linda says. The night I sang it to Linda, she says that Child had known it as "The Broken Token." Yeah.

JN: That's very good, very good.