

Reuben Wright and Phoebe Brown

As sung by
Hamilton Lobdell
06-24-1941 Mukwonago, WI

Reuben Wright and Phoebe Brown

In Man-ches-ter a mai-den dwelt, Her name was Phoe - be Brown. Her cheeks were red
(Spoken)

and her hair was black, And she was considered by all good judges to be, by all odds,
The best look-ing gal. in town.

* Verses 2-8

LITHOGRAPHED BY WISCONSIN BLUE PRINT CO.

Lines in () are spoken.

Verse 1.

In Manchester a maiden dwelt; her name was Phoebe Brown.
Her cheeks were red,
(And her hair was black, and she was considered by all good judges, to be, by all odds,)
The best looking gal in town.

Verse 2.

Now Reuben was a nice young man, as any in the town,
And Phoebe loved him dearly,
(But on account of his bein' obliged to work out for a livin', he couldn't make himself very agreeable)
To old Mister and Missus Brown.

Verse 3.

But Phoebe's heart was brave and strong; she feared no parent's frown,
And as for Reuben Wright so bold,
(I've heard him say more'n a dozen times, with the exception of Pheobe, he didn't give a --- cent)
For the whole race of Browns.

Verse 4.

So Reuben Wright and Phoebe Brown determined they would marry.
Three weeks ago last Tuesday night,
(They started for old Parson Brown's, in Webster, determined to enter the dismal swamp of Matrimony, although it was tremendously dark)
And it rained like the old Harry.

Verse 5.

Old Captain Brown was wide awake; he loaded his old gun.
He then pursued the lovin' pair,
(And he overtook 'em when they'd got about half-way to the parsonage, when Phoebe and Reuben)
Started off on the run.

Verse 6.

Old Brown, he took a deadly aim right at young Reuben's head,
But oh, it was a burning shame,
(Stead of that, you see, he saw his only daughter, Phoebe,)
Drop right down, stone dead.

Verse 7.

The anguish filled young Reuben's heart, and vengeance crazed his brain.
He drew a tremendous jack-knife out,
(Two foot and a half long, and he plunged that fifty, sixty times right into old Brown, and 'twas
doubtful whether he'd ever)
Come to again.

Verse 8.

Then Reuben Wright with frenzy tore the hair from off his head,
And when thus scalped, the pain was such,
(That he woke, found himself sitting up in bed, bootjack on his chest, for, having been out to a tea-
party the night before, he so regaled himself with buckwheat cakes, all hot,)
That he had a nightmare on getting into bed.

Transcription and lyrics from the Helene Stratman-Thomas Collection.

Critical Commentary

Transcriptions by Peters, p. 297, and HST

HST notes:

In the Professional Papers series:

Sung by Hamilton Lobdell, age 87, Mukwanago, 1941.

Mr. Lobdell learned the yarn about Reuben and Phoebe from his older brother, Dwight, who used to perform it at singing school and spelling socials near Mukwanago. The words of this bit of Americana are contained in Songs A LA PRESTIDIGITATIVE OIL DE HAMLIN on an advertisement for Hamlin's Wizard Oil (no date). The text appears in Garrett's compilation as "Love, Murder, and Almost Matrimony." As may be expected, the yarn grows bigger and better with Mr. Lobdell's retelling of it.

Sources:

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.