

Awake, Arise, You Drowsy Sleeper

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

Awake, arise, you drowsy sleeper

"A-wake, a-rise, you drow-sy sleep-er, A-wake, a-rise, 'tis al-most day, And o-pen
wide your bed-room win-dow, Hear what your true - love has to say."

Version 11

The image shows a handwritten musical score on aged paper. At the top, the title "Awake, arise, you drowsy sleeper" is written. Below it, there are two staves of music in G major and 3/4 time. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are written below the notes. A handwritten note "Version 11" is in the top right corner. At the bottom of the page, there are three empty musical staves.

Verse 1.

"Awake, arise, you drowsy sleeper,
Awake, arise, 'tis almost day,
And open wide your bedroom window,
Hear what your true-love has to say."

Verse 2.

"Oh Mary dear, go ask your father,
Whether you my bride may be,
And if he says no, love, come and tell me,
It's the very last time I'll trouble thee."

Verse 3.

"I dare not go to ask my father,
For he lies on his couch of rest,
And by his side he keeps a weapon,
To slay the one that I love best."

Verse 4.

"Oh Mary dear, go ask your mother,
Whether you my bride may be,
And if she says no, love, come and tell me,
It's the very last time I'll trouble thee."

Verse 5.

"I dare not go to ask my mother,
To let her know my love is near,
But dearest dear, go court some other,"
She gently whispered in my ear.

Verse 6.

"Oh Mary dear, oh dearest Mary,
It is for you my heart will break.
From North to South to Pennsylvania,
I'll roam the ocean for your sake."

Verse 7.

"And now I'll go down by some silent river,
And there I'll spend my days and years,
And there I'll plant a weeping willow;
Beneath its shade I'll shed my tears."

Verse 8.

"Come back, come back, my wounded lover,
Come back, come back to me, I pray,
And I'll forsake both father, mother,
And with you I'll run away."

Critical Commentary

Transcriptions by Peters, p. 159, and HST.

HST notes:

In the Professional Papers series:

Version A

Sung by Lester A. Coffee, age 75, at Harvard, Illinois, 1946. Recorded by Aubrey Snyder and Phyllis Pinkerton.

English, Scottish and Irish origins have been claimed for this ballad. To Mr. Coffee, it was “just another old song I learned as a boy in Pittsville, Wisconsin.” The ballad has circulated widely throughout the United States and is found in folk song collections under various titles – “Who is that under my bedroom window”, “Oh Mary dear, go ask your mother”, “Drowsy sleeper”, “Who is tapping at my window?” and others. Some versions contain the tragic ending of the ballad “The Silver Dagger”, in which the girl and her lover commit suicide with the silver weapon.

A version “Oh Mary dear, go ask your mother” came to northern Wisconsin from Kentucky with the Jacobs Family at the turn of the century. Recordings were made from the singing of Mrs. Ollie Jacobs (LC No. 4983) and of her daughter, Mrs. Pearl Jacobs Borusky (LC No. 4984).

Version B

Who is that under my bedroom window?

Sung by Dan Tanner, age 75, Boyne City, Michigan, 1941.

(Transcribed from a recording made by Mr. Tanner’s grand-nephew, Paul Curtiss, a University of Wisconsin student) [editor’s note: see transcription below]

This version came to Dan Tanner from his mother. Mr. Tanner was born in Bangor, Maine and spent his early boyhood in Michigan. At the age of twelve, he began working in the Kelly Mills near Wausau. Later he returned to Michigan to work in lumbercamps for 17 years.

Version C

Oh Mary dear, go ask your mother

Sung by Mrs. Pearl Jacobs Borusky, age 40, Pearson, 1941.

Grandma learned this when a little girl at school, Pearl from her father.

Version D

Oh Mary dear, go ask your mother

Sung by Mrs. Ollie Jacobs, age 79, Pearson, 1941.

The Jacobs family learned the song in their earlier home in Carter County, Ky. They came to Wisconsin in 1906.

Keta
WHO IS THAT UNDER MY BEDROOM WINDOW

Who is that un - der my bed - room win - dow A - weep - ing there
so bit - terly? A - rouse a - rouse, you drow - sy sleep - er He
soft - ly whis - pered un - to me.

Editor's notes:

Scarborough writes that because this song is Irish, it was not in Child's collection (Scarborough 139). McNeil disagrees: "it is generally accepted that 'The Drowsy Sleeper' originated as a British broadside ballad," though it is "frequently confused with 'The Silver Dagger,' a similar ballad of American origin" (McNeil 73). However, McNeil acknowledges that some details of "The Silver Dagger" in Sharp's collection (vol. II, p. 229) are British (McNeil 73). Current versions vary widely in both text and tune.

Alternate titles/related songs: "Arise, Arise," "Katy Dear," "Willie Darling," "Molly Dear," "Go ask your Mother," "Drowsy Sleepers," "The Silver Dagger," "The Bloody Dagger," "Little Willie," "Who is that Under My Bedroom Window?," "Who is Tapping at My Window?," "Awake! Awake!"

Sources:

- Asch, Moses, editor. *124 Folk Songs, As Recorded on Folkways Records by Famous Folk Song Singers*. New York: Robbins Music Corporation, 1965. "Arise, Arise."
- Campbell, Olive Dame and Cecil J. Sharp, collectors. *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians: Comprising 122 Songs and Ballads, and 323 Tunes*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1917. "Awake! Awake!"
- Gardner, Emelyn Elizabeth, and Geraldine Jencks Chickering, collectors and editors. *Ballads and Songs of Southern Michigan*. Hatboro, Pa.: Folklore Associates, 1967. Reprinted from original, c1939.
- McNeil, W.K., ed. *Southern Folk Ballads*. Vol. 1. The American Folklore Series, ed. W.K. McNeil. Little Rock: August House Publishers, 1987. "The Drowsy Sleeper."
- 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.
- Randolph, Vance, collector and editor. *Ozark Folksongs*. Vol. I. Columbia, Mo.: State Historical Society of Missouri, 1946-50.
- Scarborough, Dorothy. *A Song Catcher in Southern Mountains; American Folk Songs of British Ancestry*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1937.
- Sharp, Cecil J., collector. *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*. London: Oxford University Press, 1932. "Awake! Awake!"

K.G.