

# Old Elm Tree

As sung by  
**Winifred Bundy**  
07-23-1946 Madison, WI

The musical score is written on a single staff in treble clef, with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. The melody is simple and folk-like, with a mix of quarter, eighth, and half notes. The lyrics are printed below the staff, with line numbers 7, 13, 18, 23, and 28 marking the beginning of each line of music. The lyrics describe a scene by an old mill and bridge, with a focus on nature and a nostalgic memory of a woman named Laura.

7 There's a path by an old de - ser - ted mill, and a fish by the old bridge  
bro - ken still. Where the gol - den wil - low — boughs ben - ding low, o'er the  
13 green mos - sy bank where the vi - o - lets grow. — The wild birds are  
18 sing - ing — their sa - me sweet lays, that are char - ming in — dreams of the  
23 dear old days; when Lau - ra my beau - ti - ful sat — by  
28 me, through the long sum - mer hours 'neath the o - ld elm tree.

## Verse 1.

There's a path by an old deserted mill,  
And a fish by the old bridge broken still.  
Where the golden willow boughs bending low,  
O'er the green mossy bank where the violets grow.  
The wild birds are singing their same sweet lays,  
That are charming in dreams of the dear old days;  
When Laura my beautiful sat by me,  
Through the long summer hours 'neath the old elm tree.

## Verse 2.

'Twas there with the deep blue skies above,  
That I told her the tale of my heart's true love.  
And there ere the blossoms of summer died,  
She had whispered the promise to be my bride.  
And there fell the tears of our parting sore,  
Oh little we dreamed we should meet no more;  
That ere our return o'er the deep blue sea,  
They would make her a grave 'neath the old elm tree.

(Lyrics continued next page)

## Verse 3.

Oh, cruel in fall were the tales they told,  
 That my vows were broken, my love grown cold.  
 That my truant heart held another dear,  
 Forgetting the vows they had plighted here.  
 And her cheek grew pale with her heart('s) dull pain,  
 And the beautiful lips never smiled again;  
 And she bitterly wept where none could see,  
 She wept o'er the pot in the old elm tree.

## Verse 4.

She died and they parted her silken hair,  
 O'er the cold pale brow death had left so fair.  
 And they laid her to rest where sweet wild flowers  
 Could bloom o'er her grave through the long summer hours.  
 Oh Laura, dear Laura, my heart's true love,  
 Shall we meet in that beautiful world above?  
 Her thought not a treasure so dear to me,  
 As the lonely grave 'neath the old elm tree.

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## Critical Commentary

### HST notes:

In the Professional Papers series:

*Winifred Bundy. Her mother's favorite ballad - her showpiece.*

### Editor's notes:

The music of this song is by Joseph Philbrick Webster (1819-75), lyrics by Sarah S. Bolton. Webster also wrote the music to "In the Sweet By and By," "Softly, Lightly, Sweetly Sing," "Little Maud," a musical adaptation of a Thomas Bailey Aldrich poem [see **Little Maude**], and "Brave Men, Behold your Fallen Chief" (McNeil 175).

### Sources:

Barry, Phillips, ed. *The Maine Woods Songster*. Cambridge, Mass.: Powell Printing, 1939.

McNeil, W.K., ed. *Southern Folk Ballads, vol. 2*. The American Folklore Series, ed. W.K. McNeil. Little Rock: August House Publishers, 1987.

Randolph, Vance, coll. and ed. *Ozark Folksongs. Vol. IV*. Columbia, Mo.: State Historical Society of Missouri, 1946-50. Text only.

Digital Tradition Folk Music Database, "Digital Traditions Mirror: The Old Elm Tree."

<<http://sniff.numachi.com/~rickheit/dtrad/pages/tiOLDELM;ttOLDELM.html>> (accessed 9 May 2005) Text similar, tune has some similarities. No credits or other sources given.

K.G.