

# Singing the Child Ballads

Rosaleen writes:

## Clerk Saunders, #69

One of my favourites, both for its tenderness (see verse 12, for example), and for its building sense of doom. I found my version in Stephen Sedley's *The Seeds of Love* many years ago. The text is collated from Child and the version in *The Oxford Book of Ballads*, which may derive from an early broadside. The tune is from Motherwell's *Minstrelsy Ancient and Modern* (1827). I have changed a few words here and there in this and the following ballads.

## Lord Thomas and Fair Annet, #73

...of which I have two versions, sufficiently different in style to warrant not being able to choose.

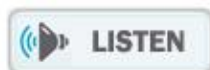
The first, more poetic, text is from the Old Country (Scotland, that is, not England, although

there is an English version, "Lord Thomas and Fair Ellinor", dating from Charles II's reign). It is in *The Seeds of Love*, text collated from Child and tune from Christie and Johnson.

My second version I found much later in *The Ballad Book of John Jacob Niles* (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961) where it is titled "Lord Thomas and Fair Ellen" and is said to have been collected by Niles from Miss Bertha Maypothor at Ringgold, Georgia, in 1933. Shorter than the Scottish version (14 verses instead of 21) it has a livelier tune and a cheerful irreverence, the verbal exchange between Fair Ellen and the brown girl degenerating into a schoolyard slanging match before it turns, suddenly, to tragedy.

Space in this issue does not permit reprinting more ballads, so—more next time.

## Clerk Saunders



[www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue40\\_2/Clerk\\_Saunders.mp3](http://www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue40_2/Clerk_Saunders.mp3)

Clerk Saun-ders and May Mar-gar-et Were  
walk-ing in the gar-den green, And deep and heav-y  
was the love that has be-fallen these two be-tween.

Clerk Saunders and May Margaret  
Were walking in the garden green,  
And deep and heavy was the love  
That has befallen these two between.

A bed a bed, Clerk Saunders said  
A bed a bed for you and me  
Ah no Ah no, the lady said  
Until the time we married be.

For in will come my seven brothers  
And all their torches burning bright  
They'll say, we have but one sister  
And here she's lying with a knight.

Then I'll take the sword from my scabbard  
And slowly slowly lift the pin  
And you may swear and save your oath  
You never let Clerk Saunders in.

You'll take me up into your arms  
And lay me low down on your bed  
And you may swear and save your oath  
That your bower-floor I did not tread.

They were not well into the room  
Nor yet laid well into the bed  
When in and came her seven brothers  
With all their torches burning red.

And out and spoke the first of them:  
O but love be wondrous keen  
And out and spoke the second of them:  
'Twere sin to kill a sleeping man.

And out and spoke the third brother:  
We had better go and let him be  
And out and spoke the fourth brother:  
He'll not be killed this night for me.

And out and spoke the fifth of them:  
I know they have been lovers dear  
And out and spoke the sixth of them:  
They have been in love this many a year.

But out and spoke the seventh brother:  
Although there were no man but me  
I bear the brand into my hand  
Shall quickly make Clerk Saunders die.

And he's taken out his bright long sword  
And drew it three times through the straw

And thro' and thro' Clerk Saunders' body  
He's made that trusty rapier go.

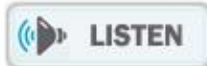
Saunders he started and Margaret she turned  
Into his arms as asleep she lay  
And there she slept by her love's side  
Until the dawning of the day.

Awake awake Clerk Saunders, she said  
Awake awake for sin and shame  
For the sheets they are asweat, she said  
And I'm afraid we shall be ta'en.

But he lay still and slept sound  
Albeit the sun began to shine  
She drew the curtains back a bit  
And dull and drowsy were his eyes.

O woe be unto my brother  
I wat an ill death he may die  
He's killed Clerk Saunders, an earl's son  
That pledged his faith to marry me.

## Lord Thomas and Fair Annet



[www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue40\\_2/Lord\\_Thomas\\_and\\_Fair\\_Annet.mp3](http://www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue40_2/Lord_Thomas_and_Fair_Annet.mp3)

Lord Thom - as and fair An - net sat  
all day on a hill, When night was come and  
sun was set They had not talked their fill.

Lord Thomas and fair Annet  
Sat all day on a hill,  
When night was come and sun was set  
They had not talked their fill.

Lord Thomas said a word in haste  
And Annet took it ill:  
I winna wed a dowerless maid  
Against my parents' will.

You're come of the rich, Thomas  
And I'm come of the poor  
I'm ower low to be your bride  
And I winna be your whore.

O fair Annet, O fair Annet  
This night you've said me no

But long or ever this day month  
I'll make your heart right woe.

Come riddle my riddle dear mother he said  
Come riddle it all in one  
Whether I will take her, fair Annet  
Or bring the brown girl home.

The nut-brown maid has gold and gear  
Fair Annet she has none  
And the little beauty fair Annet has  
O it will soon be gone.

Sheep will die in cots, mother  
And oxen die in byre  
And what is this world's wealth to me  
An I get not my heart's desire.

Where will I get me a pretty little boy  
That'll run my errands soon  
That will run for me to fair Annet's bower  
And bid her to my wedding.

She mauna put on the black, the black  
Nor yet the dowie brown  
But the scarlet so red and the kerchief so white  
And her bonny locks hanging down.

She has called her maries to her bower  
To lay gold on her hair  
Where'er you put a plait before  
See you lay ten times mair.

When Annet was in her saddle set  
She flamed against the fire  
The girdle around her middle small  
Was worth an earl's hire.

The horse fair Annet rode upon  
He bounded like the wind  
With silver he was shod before  
With burning gold behind.

And when she came into the kirk  
She shimmered like the sun  
The belt that was about her waist  
Was all with pearls bedone.

Is this your bride, Lord Thomas? she said  
I think she's wondrous brown  
You might have had as fair a bride  
As e'er the sun shined on.

Despise her not fair Annet, he said  
Despise her not to me  
For better I love thy little finger  
Than all her whole body.

Then out and spoke the nut-brown bride  
And she spoke out of spite  
O where got you that rose-water  
That washed your face so white?

O I did get that rose-water  
Where you will ne'er get none  
For I did get that rose-water  
Into my mother's womb.

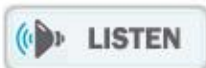
The bride she drew a long bodkin  
From out her gay headgear  
And struck fair Annet to the heart  
A deep wound and a sair.

O art thou blind Lord Thomas, she said  
Or do you not well see  
O do you not see my own heart's blood  
Run trickling down my knee.

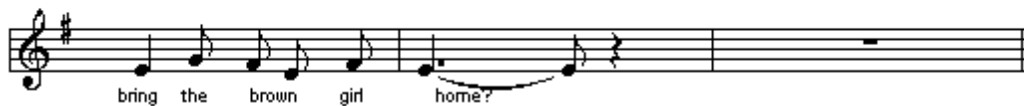
He drew his dagger that was so sharp  
That was so sharp and meet  
And drove it into the nut-brown bride  
That fell dead at his feet.

O dig my grave, Lord Thomas said  
Dig it both wide and deep  
And lay fair Annet by my side  
And the brown girl at my feet.

## Lord Thomas and Fair Ellen



[www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue40\\_2/Lord\\_Thomas\\_and\\_Fair\\_Ellen.mp3](http://www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue40_2/Lord_Thomas_and_Fair_Ellen.mp3)



“Oh riddle me, Mother, riddle me,  
And sing it all in one:  
It’s shall I marry sweet Ellen the fair,  
Or bring the brown girl home?  
Or bring the brown girl home?”

“You know the brown girl has farms and lands,  
You know fair Ellen hath none.  
That’s why I say, my own dear son,  
Go bring the brown girl home”. (twice)

He dressed himself in scarlet red,  
And he wore a golden ring,  
And every village he passèd through,  
They took him for some king.

He rode up to fair Ellen’s gate.  
And tingled on her ring,  
None was so handy as Ellen herself  
To rise and let him in.

“What news, what news, what news?” cried she,  
“You’ve come so far away”.  
“Oh, it’s I have come to invite you  
To guest my wedding day.”

She dressed herself in scarlet red,  
And she wore a bodice of green,  
And every village she passèd through,  
They thought she was some queen.

She proudly rode to Thomas’s gate  
And loudly tingled the ring,  
And none was so spry as Thomas himself  
To run and let her in.

He led her by the lily hand,  
He led her through room and hall,  
And sat her down in a canopy chair,  
Well placed against the wall.

“Is this the bride?” fair Ellen cried,  
“She is so wondrous brown.  
You might have wed the fairest girl  
Who ever walked the ground”.

Then up spake the nut-brown maiden,  
And she spake in bitter spite,  
“Where got you the water of roses, fair Ellen,  
That washes your skin so white?”

“Oh, you could wash in the melted snow,  
And you could wash in the sea,  
And you could wash till the clap of doom  
And ne’er be as white as me”.

Oh, the brown girl pluckèd a bodkin  
From out the hair of her head,  
And plunged it into fair Ellen’s heart,  
And Ellen lay cold and dead.

Lord Thomas’s sword was in his hand,  
He slashed both right and left.  
The brown girl cried, the brown girl died,  
Her life, it was bereft.

He put his sword against the wall  
And drove it into his heart.  
And there three true loves all lay dead,  
And never more did part.

## Treasures from Our Archives

### *Fifteen Years Ago*

*Bulletin* 25.2 (Summer 1991). Lynn Whidden was editor, Murray Evans and Lei Anne Sharratt guest-edited. Contents: “Canadian Folk Festival Directory 1991”, “The Folk Festival” (poem), and a controversial commentary, “The Truth About Folk Festivals”, by Mitch Podolak.

### *Ten Years Ago*

*Bulletin* 30.2 (June 1996). Seminal Canadian folksinger Alan Mills was remembered in this issue, in articles by Vera Johnson, Bram Morrison and Edith Fowke; songs “Isabeau s’y promène” and “The Chesapeake and the Shannon”, from Mills’s repertoire, accompanied the article. Joe Adams’ song “Cabin Fever Blues” and poem “A Tribute to Harry Miller” were included, plus the festival directory, columns *EthnoFolk Letters* (Judith Cohen), *Over the Waves* (Tom Coxworth), and *The Centrefold* (various), and plenty of reviews.

### *Five Years Ago*

*Bulletin* 35.2 (Summer 2001). An interview with Anita Best, conducted by Elinor Benjamin, was the showpiece of this issue. Songs included two written by the late Graham Jones, “Nancy’s to the Lambing Gone” and “Raise a Glass”, plus traditional “The Wind Blows High”, “Pesticide-Free Garden” by editor Lorne Brown, and “The Golden Vanity” as Ballad of the Month. The column *A Mari Usque...* was extensive, reporting on events across Canada. As usual, there were numerous reviews.

These issues (and all back issues, either in original form or as photocopies) are available from CSTM Back Issues, 224 20<sup>th</sup> Ave. NW, Calgary, Alta. T2M 1C2. For pricing, see the Mail Order Service catalogue or website ([www.yorku.ca/cstm](http://www.yorku.ca/cstm) and follow the links), or contact [john.leeder@nucleus.com](mailto:john.leeder@nucleus.com). Cumulative Tables of Contents of all issues since 1982 are available on the website as well. [JL]