

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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The Babes in the Wood (4)

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Now ponder well, you parents dear,
These words which I shall write;
An awful story you shall hear
In time brought forth to light.

A gentle man of good account
In Northforth (Norfolk) dwelt of late,
Whose wealth and riches did surmount
Most men of high estate.

So sick he was and like to die,
No help there could he have;
His wife as sick as him did die;
They both possessed one grave.

So love between these two was lost,
And to the other kind;
And as they lived, in love they died,
And left two babes behind.

One was a fine and pretty boy
Not passing three years old;
The other a girl more younger was,
And made in beauty's mold.

The father left his little son,
Which plainly doth appear,
When he to proper age should come,
Three hundred pounds a year.

And to his little daughter dear
Two hundred pounds in gold,
For to be paid on her marriage day,
Which should not be controlled.

And if these children chanced to die,
And ne'er to age do come,
Their uncle should their wealth possess,
For so the will begun.

"Dear Brother," said the dying man,
"Look to my children dear;

Be good unto my boy and girl;
No friend else have they here.

"To God and you I do commend
My children night and day;
'Tis but a little time I have
Within this world to stay.

"You must be father and mother both,
And uncle all in one;
You know what will become of them
When I am dead and gone."

These words spoke their mother dear,
"Attention to me give;
Keep both my babes carefully,
That they may never grieve."

With lips as cold as any stone
She kissed her children small;
Saying, "God bless you both, my babes."
With that the tears did fall.

Now then the brother spake again
To that sick couple there,
"The keeping of these children dear
Sweet Sister, do not fear.

"God never prosper none of men,
Or aught else what I have,
If I do wrong your children dear
When you are in the grave."

The parents being dead and gone,
These children then he takes;
He carried both into his house,
And much of them he makes.

He did not keep these children dear
A twelve month and a day,
Before their wealth he did desire
To put them both away.

He bargained with two ruffians rude,
Which was of curious mode,
All for to take these young children,
And slay them in the woods.

He told his wife and all of them

He would these children send
To be brought up in London
By one who was a friend.

Away then with these little babes,
Rejoicing at the tide,
Rejoicing in a merry mode,
They should on horseback ride.

They played and prattled on the way
As they rode off astray
With those who would their butcher be
And work their lives away.

How then the pretty talk they had
Made the murderer's heart relent;
The one that took the deed to do
Full sore he did repent.

The other one more hardened heart
He vowed to do his charge,
Because the man that hired him
had paid hem very large.

The other one would not agree;
So then they fell to strife;
With another they did fight
About these children's lives.

But he that was of the wildest mode
Did slay the other there,
While in an uncreek (unintelligible) wintered
Those babes did quake with fear.

He took these children by the hand
While tears stood in their eyes,
And bid them go along with him
But they could not but cry.

Now two long miles he led them there
While they for bread complained
"Stay here," said he, "I'll bring you bread
When I return again."

Now hand in hand these little babes
Went wandering up and down,
But never more they saw the man,
Approaching from the town.

Thus wanders these two little babes
Till death did end their grief;
In one another's arms they died,
As babes a-wanting relief.

Their little lips with blackberries
Was all besmeared and dyed;
And when they saw the darkness of night,
They sat them down and cried.

The burying of these little babes
They did no man accuse.
The robin redbreast lovingly
Did cover them with leaves.

Now then the heavy wrath of God
Upon the uncle fell;
The awful friend he'd hauntings have
And his conscience fell in Hell.

His barns was fired; his goods were croomed;
His lands were barren made;
All cattle died within his field,
And nothing with him stayed.

And in a voyage to Portugal
Two of his sons did die,
And to conclude himself he brought
Unto such misery.

He pawned and mortgaged all his lands
In seven years brought about,
And now at length these wicked ways
By these words did come out.

Come all that are executors
Of orphans weak in sight;
Do what is right and just
And give to each that's right.

Do what is right and just
By them both day and night,
Lest God by such misery
Your wicked minds requite.

The very man that took in hand
These children for to kill
Fared robber's fate until he died,
Which was God's blessed will.

He did confess the very truth
Which is plainly here expressed;
Their uncle died, and he in death
Did long in prison dwell.

Source: Folksongs of Florida, Alton C. Morris, 1950.

DT #542
Laws Q34

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oct99