

# Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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## Hoo Can I Keep My Maidenheid

Hoo Can I Keep My Maidenheid

Hoo can I keep my maidenheid,  
My maidenheid, my maideheid;  
Hoo can I keep my maidenheid  
Amang sae mony men, O.

The captain bad a guinea for't,  
A guinea for't, a guinea for't;  
The captain bad a guinea for't,  
An' the colonel he bad ten, O.

But I'll do as my minnie did,  
My minnie did, my minnie did;  
I'll do as my minnie did,  
For siller I'll hae nane, O.

I'll gie it tae a bonnie lad;  
A bonnie lad, a bonnie lad;  
I'll gie it tae a bonnie lad,  
For just as gude again, O.

An auld moulie maidenheid,  
A maidenheid, a maidenheid,  
An auld moulie maidenheid,  
The weary wark I ken, O.

The stretchin' o't, the strivin' o't,  
The borin' o't, the rivin' o't,  
And ay the double drivin' o't,  
The farther ye gang ben, O.

Hoo can I keep my maidenheid,  
My maidenheid, my maidenheid;  
Hoo can I keep my maidenheid  
Amang sae mony men, O.

"Hoo Can I Keep My Maidenheid" appeared in the 1800 edition of *The Merry Muses of Caledonia* to the tune of "The Birks o' Abergeldie". Burns used the tune once before for a song of the same name in *The Scots Musical Museum*. He likely collected the lyrics from tradition and had a hand in editing them and putting them to music.

"Hoo Can I Keep My Maidenheid" has a sing-song quality to it with its nursery rhyme-like simplicity and meter. Yet it is a rather adult tale about a maiden keep ing her virginity. Burns delights in the adult subject matter placed in the child-like voice of the song.

Although men have offered her money "for't", she will have none of that and will do as her mother did. The temptation is strong and it is "weary wark" to keep her maidenheid, but she will wait and "gie it tae a bonnie lad". This song might have found its way to an anthology of Burns's work for a general audience were it not for the second to the last stanza:

The stretchin' o't, the strivin' o't,  
The borin' o't, the rivin' o't,  
And ay the double drivin' o't,  
The farther ye gang ben, O.

It was far too sexually suggestive for the "polite" audiences many anthology editors sought. However, this bold and clever little song found a home in The Merry Muses of Caledonia. Even among Burns's other bawdy songs, "Hoo Can I keep My Maidenheid" stands out as exceptional.

There's a nice fragment of what looks like an older relative of this song, to be given in Vol 8 of the Greig & Duncan Collection, due out next year or so.

(I've omitted repetitions in lines 1 and 3)

My father bigget a bower for me  
To haud me frae the men.  
But the win' dung in the gavel o't  
And in cam' a' the men.

They're seekin' me the but the hoose  
And they're seekin' me the ben  
And I canna keep my maidenhead  
Amo' so many men

KL, EMV  
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