

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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Dewy Dens of Yarrow

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There were five sons and two were twins
There were five sons of Yarrow
They all did fightn for their own true loven
In the dewy dens of Yarrow

Oh mother dear I hadn a dream
A dream of grief and sorrow
I dreamed I was gathering heather blooms
In the dewy dens of Yarrow

Oh daughter dear I readn your dream
Your dream of grief and sorrow
Your love, your love is lying slain
In the dewy dens of Yarrow

She sought him up and she sought him down
She sought him all through Yarrow
And then she found him lying slain
In the dewy dens of Yarrow

She washed his face and she combed his hair
She combed it neat and narrow
And then she washed that bloody bloody wound
That he got in the Yarrow

Her hair it was three quarters long
The color it was yello
She wound it round his waist so small
And took him home from Yarrow

Oh Mother dear go maken my bedn
Go make it neat and narrow
My love my love he diedn for me
I'll die for him to-morrow

Oh daughter dear don't be so grieved
So grieved with grief and sorrow
I'll wedn you to a better one
Than you lost in the Yarrow

She dressed herself in clean white clothes
And away to the waters of Yarrow

And there she laid her own self down
And died on the banks of the Yarrow

The wine that runs through the water deepn
Comes from the sons of Yarrow
They all did fightn for their own true loven
In the dewy dens of Yarrow

Child #214

Max Hunter, Folksongs from the Ozarks, 1963, Folk-Legacy Records.

Max Hunter's version of "The Dewy Dens of Yarrow" was learned from Herbert Philbrick, an old man who lived in Crocker, Missouri, in the summer of 1957. The text actually combines elements of two of the Child ballads: #214 ("The Braes o' Yarrow) and #215 ("Rare Willie Drowned in Yarrow"). Mary Celestia Parler, who wrote the notes that accompany Max's record, notes its textual similarity to the version Herbert Halpert collected from George Edwards in the Catskills, although the tune is quite different. I would urge you to read the extensive introductory note to #214 in Child's *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, which you can probably find in your library. If not, urge your librarian to order it through inter-library loan. Better still, look at the numerous versions with tunes that were gathered by Bertrand Bronson (42 versions of #214 and 9 of #215) and published in Volume 3 of *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads*.

Child and Bronson demonstrate the historical and geographical range of the ballad(s) much more completely than we can offer here, but both seem to have originated in Scotland, with the earliest text of #215 showing up in Orpheus Caledonius (1733). Bronson also includes a fine version that Mary Parler overlooked (or had no access to) when she wrote the notes for my recording of Max Hunter, namely the fine versio
on one of our "custom" cassettes, and comes with the accompanying booklet of notes
and lyrics.

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