

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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The Lineman's Hymn

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As I walked out in the streets of old Burley,
As I walked out in Burley one day,
I spied a young lineman all wrapped in white linen,
All wrapped in white linen and cold as the clay.

"I see by your scare-strap(1) that you are a lineman,"
These words he did say, as I boldly walked by,
"Come sit down beside me, and hear my sad story,
I fell off the pole and I know I must die.

"'Twas once up the poles I used to go dashing,
Once up the poles I used to go gay;
First up the sixties, and then up the nineties,
But I fell off an eighteen, and I'm dying today.

"Oh, ring the phone softly, and climb the pole slowly,
Check your D-rings(2) when you go aloft;
Keep your hooks(3) sharpened, and grease up your scarestrap;
I'm telling you, Buddy, that ground ain't so soft.

"Get me six drunken linemen to carry my coffin,
Six splicers' helpers(4) to mud-in(5) my grave;
Take me to Kline, the Great White Father(6),
And let him mourn over his gallant young slave."

(1) scare-strap - a wide, heavy leather belt with which linemen fasten themselves to the telegraph pole.

(2) D-rings - large metal rings, in the shape of a "D", to which the scare-strap is hooked.

(3) books - the sharp spurs or gaffs bound to the lineman's shoes which bite into the wooden pole as he climbs it, or as he braces himself against the scare-strap.

(4) splicer's helpers - assistant cable splicers

(5) mud-in - refilling a hole, as after a wooden pole has been set in the ground.

(6) Great White Father - a sarcastic appellation for Harry Kline (see headnote to ballad above).

(Sung by Rosalie Sorrels)

This is another of numerous parodies of "The Cowboy's Lament," and comes from the tradition of telephone linemen. The tune is a conventional one,

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and the text is a close recension of the cowboy ballad, but is loaded with linemen's lingo, and placed in a local setting. Once more, death of the unfortunate hero is a violent one, but with the ironic twist that he meets his doom by falling from a low pole, though his job frequently calls for ascents of far greater heights.

Mrs. Rosalie Sorrels sings a version learned by her husband, Jim (a former linesman for the Mountain States Telephone Company), in 1953, from Russ Rogers, a boomer lineman, in Burley, Idaho. Mrs. Sorrels reports that the Kline mentioned in the last stanza was one Harry Kline, known among linemen as a tough boss who has performed some amazing feats. Legend has it, Mrs. Sorrels informs us, that Kline once went into the Malad (Idaho) telephone office shortly after some tall drinking, proceeded to take the operator on hi could inspire such a fine legend could also be responsible for one of the best-parodies yet written to "The Cowboy's Lament."

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