

# Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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## Water Water Wallflower 2

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1.

Water, water wallflower, growing up so high,  
We are all maidens, we must all die.  
Except ----, she's the youngest of them all;  
She can dance, she can sing,  
And she can dance the wedding ring [or "Hieland fling"]  
Fie! fie! fie for shame!  
Turn your back to the wall again.

2.

Water, water, wallflowers,  
Growing up so high:  
We are all young maidens,  
And we shall all die  
--Excepting Maggie Stuart,  
She's the youngest of us all:  
She can dance, and she can sing,  
And she can knock us all!  
Fie! fie! for shame again!  
She'll turn her back to the wall again.

3.

Water, water, wall-flowers,  
Growing up so high,  
We are all ladies,  
And we must all die.  
But the youngest of us all,  
Turn their faces to the wall.  
[So on, to the oldest.]  
Water, water, wall-flowers,  
Growing up so high,  
We are all ladies,  
And we must all die.  
But the oldest of us all,  
Turn their faces to the wall.  
[So on, to the youngest.]

4.

Water, water wallflower, growing up so high,  
We are all maidens, and we must all die,  
Excepting ----, the youngest of us all,  
She can dance and she can sing, and she can knock us all  
down.

Fie, fie, fie, for shame,  
Turn your back to the wall again.

5.

Water, water wallflowers, growing up so high,  
We are all maidens, we must all die,  
Except Maggie Brown, she's the youngest of us all,  
She can dance, and she can sing, and hold the candle.  
(Or, While we go through the ring.)  
Fie, fie, fie, for shame,  
Turn your back to the wall again.

6.

Water, water, welsey,  
Soaring up so high,  
We are all maidens,  
But we must all die,  
Especially Annie Anderson,  
She's the fairest flower,  
She shall dance, she shall sing,  
In a lady's bower.  
Turn your back to the well again.

7.

Water, water, well-flower,  
Growing up so high;  
We are all maidens,  
And we must all die;  
Excepting Mary Wilson,  
For she's the fairest flower;  
She can dance, and she can sing,  
And she can lick the sugar.  
Fie, fie, fie, fie, fie, shame!  
Turn your back to the wall again.

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(1) Gomme II.335, no. xx, from Galloway; other versions: p. 336, no. xxv [Cullen & Nairn, evidently]: differ is "She must kick,/ And she must fling,/ And she must turn the sofa". no. xxvi (p.337, Cullen & Nairn) has "She can hop, and she can skip,/ She can turn the sofa"; xxvii (Aberdeen), "She can skip, she can dance,/ She can ding us all o'er". no. xxviii (Nairn) has "Green, green grovers, growing up so high,/ We are all maidens,/ And we must all die;/ Except ----, the youngest of us all,/ She can dance, she can sing,/ She can dance the Hieland fling;/ Fie! fie! fie, for shame!/ Turn your back to us again." Number xxix (from Dyke): "Water, water, well stones,/ Growing up so high,/ We are all maidens,/ And we must all die./ Except ----,/ She's the youngest of us

all,/ She can dance, she can sing,/ She can dance the  
`Hielan' Fling,'/ Oh fie, fie, for shame,/ Turn your  
back to us again." Gomme notes "Another version from  
Forfarshire gives `Green, green grivers,' and `Pull the  
cradle string' for `Dance the Hielan' Fling,' and one  
from Nairn is `Tu

connected with death (of the betrothed of the youngest  
maiden?), which accounts for the turning the face to the  
wall. The shame may derive from the enforced spinsterhood of  
the bereaved maiden.

(2) Nicholson Golspie (1897), 174 (tune, 205); a ring  
game: "you skip round hand in hand to air of rhyme". At  
mention of the girl's name, she has to turn her back to  
the wall.

(3) Greig FSNE clii.2.

(4) Montgomerie SNR (1946), 64 (no. 68), from Ford CR 75  
(who has "wildflower" in line 1); Ford notes:

Forming a ring, all join hands and dance, or move  
slowly round, singing [the first part above]. Here  
all clap hands, with the exception of the one named,  
who stands looking abashed, while the others sing  
[the second part]. At the command, she who has been  
named turns, so that she faces outwards now, with her  
back to the centre of the ring; though she still  
clasps hands with those on either side, and continues  
in the movement, singing with the others. When all  
in like manner have been chapped out, and are facing  
the open, the game is finished.

This text also in MacColl, *Streets of Song*, no. 21; "Hide-  
and-go-see game, learned in Glasgow as a child." Cf.  
also "Up and down the street". Kerr *Guild of Play*, 7  
(no. 8), with music ("Water, water Wallfowers"), with var.  
"children" in line 3.

(5) Maclagan GDA (1901), 84, with music, from Argyll.

"The one named turns about, and the process is continued  
with the others."

(6) Maclagan, 86. Referring to "Sweet Mary", "Round  
Apples", etc., and his version no. (5) above, he says:

"All these are simply circular dances of a primitive  
sort, accompanied by the voice, and none of them seem to  
indicate any connection with any special ceremony. [An  
opinion with which Lady Gomme might not agree.] But in  
Perthshire, about the middle of this century [i.e. c.  
1850], the following rhyme, part of which, at any rate,  
appears in one of those given above, was habitually sung  
when several girls reached the well to draw water at the  
same time. They formed a ring, and, after the first had  
drawn the water, sang [the above]. This the collector

remembers quite well from childhood, and though it is in English, all the children who sang it spoke Gaelic habitually." The Opies (Singing Game, 1985, 246) connect this with former well-worship.

(7) Rymour Club Misc. I (1906-11), 70, from Edinburgh; with tune. Ritchie Golden City (1965), 59 [and music, p. 177], is close, with 6 For she's the fondest lover, etc. The leader stands with her back to the wall, and turns when told. The others scatter or hide while she counts an agreed number.

Fraser (1975) has a Ballater version with "She can hop and she can skip/ And she can turn her mangle-stick", whereas in Burghead: "She acn dance and she can sing,/ And she can do the Highland Fling,/ Fly, fly, fly for shame,/ Turn your back and look again!"

See also Willa Muir Living With Ballads (1965), 19, with tune, from N.-E. Scotland, c. 1901; second part runs "All except (So-and so)./ She is young and she is pretty,/ She is the girl of the golden city," which is a borrowing from "The Wind, the Wind," q.v. Opies (1985), 244 ff., with tune from Worcs. The connection of the opening words with the old Scots lament, as in the song "Waly waly up the bank", is rather tenuous; cf. the Somerset version in Gomme & Sharp V (1912), 4, "Wallflowers", beginning "Wally, wally, wally flow'r."

A fragmentary version in Those Dusty Bluebells (1965), 24 [Wallflowers, wallflowers, etc.].

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