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SIX SONGS FROM A SHROPSHIRE LAD

Alfred Edward Housman (1859–1936)

[1] Loveliest of trees

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough,
And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing white for Eastertide.
Now, of my threescore years and ten,
Twenty will not come again,
And take from seventy springs a score,
It only leaves me fifty more.
And since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room,
About the woodlands I will go
To see the cherry hung with snow.

[2] When I was one-and-twenty

When I was one-and-twenty
I heard a wise man say,
"Give crowns and pounds and guineas
But not your heart away;
Give pearls away and rubies
But keep your fancy free."
But I was one-and-twenty,
No use to talk to me.
When I was one-and-twenty
I heard him say again,
"The heart out of the bosom
Was never given in vain;
'Tis paid with sighs a plenty
And sold for endless rue."
And I am two-and-twenty,
And oh, 'tis true, 'tis true.

[3] Look not in my eyes

Look not in my eyes, for fear
They mirror true the sight I see,
And there you find your face too clear
And love it and be lost like me.
One the long nights through must lie
Spent in star-defeated sighs,
But why should you as well as I
Perish? Gaze not in my eyes.
A Grecian lad, as I hear tell,
One that many loved in vain,
Looked into a forest well
And never looked away again.
There, when the turf in springtime flowers,
With downward eye and gazes sad,
Stands amid the glancing showers
A jonquil, not a Grecian lad.

[4] Think no more, lad

Think no more, lad; laugh, be jolly;
Why should men make haste to die?
Empty heads and tongues a-talking
Make the rough road easy walking,
And the feather pate of folly
Bears the falling sky.
Oh, 'tis jesting, dancing, drinking
Spins the heavy world around.
If young hearts were not so clever,
Oh, they would be young for ever;
Think no more; 'tis only thinking
Lays lads underground

[5] The lads in their hundreds

The lads in their hundreds to Ludlow come in for the fair,
There's men from the barn and the forge and the mill and the fold,
The lads for the girls and the lads for the liquor are there,
And there with the rest are the lads that will never be old.
There's chaps from the town and the field and the till and the cart,
And many to count are the stalwart, and many the brave,
And many the handsome of face and the handsome of heart,
And few that will carry their looks or their truth to the grave.
I wish one could know them, I wish there were tokens to tell
The fortunate fellows that now you can never discern;
And then one could talk with them friendly and wish them farewell
And watch them depart on the way that they will not return.
But now you may stare as you like and there's nothing to scan;
And brushing your elbow unguessed at and not to be told
They carry back bright to the coiner the mintage of man,
The lads that will die in their glory and never be old.

[6] Is my team ploughing

"Is my team ploughing,
That I was used to drive
And hear the harness jingle
When I was man alive?"
Ay, the horses trample,
The harness jingles now;
No change though you lie under
The land you used to plough.
"Is football playing
Along the river-shore,
With lads to chase the leather,
Now I stand up no more?"
Ay, the ball is flying,
The lads play heart and soul;
The goal stands up, the keeper
Stands up to keep the goal.
"Is my girl happy,
That I thought hard to leave,
And has she tired of weeping
As she lies down at eve?"
Ay, she lies down lightly,
She lies not down to weep:
Your girl is well contented.
Be still, my lad, and sleep.
"Is my friend hearty,
Now I am thin and pine,
And has he found to sleep in
A better bed than mine?"
Yes, lad, I lie easy,
I lie as lads would choose;
I cheer a dead man's sweetheart,
Never ask me whose.

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FOLK SONGS FROM SUSSEX

[7] A brisk young sailor courted me

A brisk young sailor courted me,
He stole away my liberty,
He won my heart with a free good-will,
He's false, I know, but I love him still.
There is an alehouse in yonder town,
Where my love goes and sits him down,
He takes another girl on his knee,
And don't you think that's a grief to me?
A grief to me! I'll tell you why,
Because she's got more gold than I,
Her gold will waste and her beauty blast,
And she'll become like me at last.
O what a foolish girl was I
To give my heart to a sailor boy,
A sailor boy although he be,
I love him better than he loves me.

[8] Seventeen come Sunday

As I walked out one May morning, one May morning so early,
As I walked out one May morning, one May morning so early,
I overtook a handsome maid, just as the sun was a-rising,
Rue dal day,
Fol diddle day,
Right fol diddle doddle dido.
Her shoes were bright, her stockings white, and her buckles shone like silver,
Her shoes were bright, her stockings white, and her buckles shone like silver,
She had a black and a rolling eye, and her hair hung down her shoulder,
Rue dal day,
Fol diddle day,
Right fol diddle doddle dido.
"Where are you going, my pretty maid, where are you going, my honey,
Where are you going, my pretty maid, where are you going, my honey?"
She answered me right cheerfully, "On an errand for my mammy."
Rue dal day,
Fol diddle day,
Right fol diddle doddle dido.

"How old are you, my pretty maid, how old are you, my honey,
How old are you, my pretty maid, how old are you, my honey?"
She answered me right cheerfully, "I am seventeen come Sunday,"
Rue dal day,
Fol diddle day,
Right fol diddle doddle dido.
And now she's with her soldier lad, where the wars they are alarming,
And now she's with her soldier lad, where the wars they are alarming,
And the drum and fife are her delight, and a merry man in the morning,
Rue dal day,
Fol diddle day,
Right fol diddle doddle dido.

[9] Roving in the dew

"Where are you going to, my pretty fair maid,
Red rosy cheeks and coal-black hair?"
"I'm going a milking, kind sir," she answered me,
"For roving in the dew makes the milk-maids fair."
"What is your father then, my pretty fair maid,
Red rosy cheeks and coal-black hair?"
"My father's a farmer, kind sir," she answered me,
"For roving in the dew makes the milk-maids fair."
"What is your mother then, my pretty fair maid,

Red rosy cheeks and coal-black hair?"
"The wife of my father, kind sir," she answered me,
"For roving in the dew makes the milk-maids fair."
"May I come along with you, my pretty fair maid,
Red rosy cheeks and coal-black hair?"
"Just as it please you, kind sir," she answered me,
"For roving in the dew makes the milk-maids fair."
"Suppose I ran away from you, my pretty fair maid,
Red rosy cheeks and coal-black hair?"
"The devil may run after you, I will stand and laugh at you,
For roving in the dew makes the milk-maids fair."

[10] The true lover's farewell

"O don't you see the little turtle-dove,
That's sitting on yonder tree,
And making moan for its own true love,
As I shall do for thee, my dear,
As I shall do for thee?"
"O fare you well, my own true love,
O fare you well for a while;
And I will surely return back again,
If I go ten thousand a-mile, my dear,
If I go ten thousand a-mile."
"Shall the stars fall from the skies, my dear,
Or the rocks melt with the sun?
I will never be false to the girl of my heart,
Till all these things be done, my dear,
Till all these things be done."

[11] Tarry trowsers

One fine morning as I was walking,
The weather being bright and clear,
I overheard a tender mother,
Talking to her daughter dear.
"Daughter, I would have you marry,
No longer lead a single life."
"O no," said she, "I'd rather tarry,
For my jolly sailor bright."
"Sailors they are given to roving,
Into foreign parts they go;
Then they leave you broken-hearted,
Full of sorrow, grief and woe."
"Mother, would you have me wed a farmer,
Take from me my heart's delight!
Give me the lad whose tarry trowsers
Shine to my eyes like diamonds bright."

BREDON HILL AND OTHER SONGS FROM A SHROPSHIRE LAD

Alfred Edward Housman (1859–1936)

[12] Bredon Hill

In summertime on Bredon
The bells they sound so clear;
Round both the shires they ring them
In steeples far and near,
A happy noise to hear.
Here of a Sunday morning
My love and I would lie,
And see the coloured counties,
And hear the larks so high
About us in the sky.
The bells would ring to call her
In valleys miles away;
"Come all to church, good people;
Good people come and pray."
But here my love would stay.
And I would turn and answer
Among the springing thyme,

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"Oh, peal upon our wedding,
And we will hear the chime,
And come to church in time."
But when the snows at Christmas
On Bredon top were strown,
My love rose up so early
And stole out unbeknown
And went to church alone.
They tolled the one bell only,
Groom there was none to see,
The mourners followed after,
And so to church went she,
And would not wait for me.
The bells they sound on Bredon,
And still the steeples hum,
"Come all to church, good people." -
O noisy bells, be dumb;
I hear you, I will come.

[13] Oh fair enough are sky and plain

Oh fair enough are sky and plain,
But I know fairer far:
Those are as beautiful again
That in the water are;
The pools and rivers wash so clean
The trees and clouds and air,
The like on earth was never seen,
And oh that I were there.
These are the thoughts I often think
As I stand gazing down
In act upon the cressy brink
To strip and dive and drown;
But in the golden sanded brooks
And azure meres I spy
A silly lad that longs and looks
And wishes he were I.

[14] When the lad for longing sighs

When the lad for longing sighs,
Mute and dull of cheer and pale,
If at death's own door he lies,
Maiden, you can heal his ail.
Lovers' ills are all to buy:
The wan look, the hollow tone,
The hung head, the sunken eye,
You can have them for your own.
Buy them, buy them: even and morn
Lovers' ills are all to sell,
Then you can lie down forlorn;
But the lover will be well.

[15] On the idle hill of summer

On the idle hill of summer,
Sleepy with the flow of streams,
Far I hear the steady drummer
Drumming like a noise in dreams.
Far and near and low and louder,
On the roads of earth go by,
Dear to friends and food for powder,
Soldiers marching, all to die.
East and west on fields forgotten
Bleach the bones of comrades slain,
Lovely lads and dead and rotten;
None that go return again.
Far the calling bugles hollo,
High the screaming fife replies,
Gay the files of scarlet follow;
Woman bore me, I will rise.

[16] With rue my heart is laden

With rue my heart is laden
For golden friends I had,
For many a rose-lipt maiden
And many a lightfoot lad.
By brooks too broad for leaping
The lightfoot boys are laid;
The rose-lipt girls are sleeping
In fields where roses fade.

[17] I will make you brooches

Robert Loius Stevenson (1850–1894) from Songs of Travel and other verses

I will make you brooches and toys for your delight
Of bird-song at morning and star-shine at night,
I will make a palace fit for you and me
Of green days in forests, and blue days at sea.
I will make my kitchen, and you shall keep your room,
Where white flows the river and bright blows the broom;
And you shall wash your linen and keep your body white
In rainfall at morning and dewfall at night.
And this shall be for music when no one else is near,
The fine song for singing, the rare song to hear!
That only I remember, that only you admire,
Of the broad road that stretches and the roadside fire.

[18] I fear thy kisses

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822)

I fear thy kisses, gentle maiden;
Thou needest not fear mine;
My spirit is too deeply laden
Ever to burden thine.
I fear thy mien, thy tones, thy motion;
Thou needest not fear mine;
Innocent is the heart's devotion
With which I worship thine.

[19] Requiescat

Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) from Poems, published in 1881

Tread lightly, she is near
Under the snow,
Speak gently, she can hear
The daisies grow.
All her bright golden hair
Tarnished with rust,
She that was young and fair
Fallen to dust.
Lily-like, white as snow,
She hardly knew
She was a woman so
Sweetly she grew.
Coffin-board, heavy stone,
Lie on her breast.
I vex my heart alone,
She is at rest.
Peace, Peace, she cannot hear
Lyre or sonnet,
All my life's buried here,
Heap earth upon it.

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And I wish that I was in that young man's arms,
That has stolen this heart of mine.

FOLK SONGS FROM SUSSEX

[20] Yonder stands a lovely creature

Yonder stands a lovely creature,
Who she is I do not know:
I'll go and court her for her beauty,
Let her answer, "yes" or "no".
"Madam, I am come to court you,
If your favour I can gain:
First your hand, love, then your welcome,
P'rhaps that I'll not come again."
"Madam, I have gold and silver,
Madam, I have house and land:
Madam, I have the world of pleasure,
All to be at your command."
"What care I for gold and silver,
What care I for house and land?
What care I for the world of pleasure,
So long as I've got a nice young man?"
"Ripest apples soonest rotten,
Hottest love it soon gets cold:
Young men's words are soon forgotten,
So pray, young man, don't speak too bold."
"After nettles then come roses,
After night then in comes day:
After a false love then a true love,
So we pass our time away."

[21] A blacksmith courted me

A blacksmith courted me nine long months and better,
He stole my heart away, wrote to me a letter,
His hammer all in his hand he looked so brave and clever,
And if I was with my love, I would live forever.
My love's gone across those fields with his cheeks like roses,
My love's gone across those fields gathering sweet posies,
I fear the scorching suns will shine and spoil his beauty,
And if I was with my love, I would do my duty.
Strange news is come from abroad, strange news is carried,
Strange news is come to tell that my love is married,
There is no truth in man, nor in father nor in brother,
And since I have lost my love, I will seek no other.

[22] Sowing the seeds of love

I sowed the seeds of love,
It will blossom all in the spring,
It will blossom in April,
in May, and in June,
When the small birds do sweetly sing.
My gard'ner was standing by,
I asked him to choose for me,
He chose me the lily, the violet and pink,
Each of them I refused all three.
The lily I did not like,
Because it does fade so soon,
The violet and pink I did both overlook,
And so now I must bide till June.
In June there's a rosy bud,
And it runs all over me,
Of times I've been kissed by those red rosy lips,
Till I gained the green willow tree.
The willow tree will twist,
And the willow tree will twine,

[23] A lawyer he went out

A lawyer he went out one day,
A riding through the city,
It was there he met with a handsome maid,
And he thought her so sweet and pretty.
"Good morning to you, pretty maid,
O whither are you going?"
"I am going a-down yonder meadow," she said,
"Where my father he is a-mowing."
"I'll take you up to London town,
And all such lovely places,
I will busk you into a silken gown,
Gold rings and gold chains and laces."
"I'll have none of your London town,
Nor any other places,
I will not be busked into a silen gown,
Gold rings and gold chains and laces."
And now she is a poor man's wife,
Her husband dearly loves her,
And she lives a sweet and contented
There's no lady in town above her.

[24] Come my own one

"Come my own one, come my fond one,
Come my dearest unto me,
Will you wed a poor sailor lad
That has just returned from sea?"
"You are ragged, love, you are dirty, love,
And your clothes smell much of tar
So begone you saucy sailor boy.
So begone you Jack Tar."
"If I'm ragged, love, if I'm dirty, love,
And my clothes smell much of tar,
I've silver in my pocket, love,
Bright gold in great store."
As soon as she heard him say so
Down on her bended knee she fell,
"I will wed you my dear Henery,
For I love a sailor lad well."
"Do you think I am foolish, love,
Do you think that I am mad,
To wed a poor country girl,
Where no fortune is to be had?"
"I'll a-cross the briny ocean,
Where meadows are so green,
And since you refuse the offer, love,
Some other girl shall wear the ring."
"I'm frolicsome, I'm easy,
Good-tempered and free,
I don't care a single pin, my boys,
What the world thinks of me."

[25] The cuckoo

The cuckoo is a merry bird, she sings as she flies,
She brings us good tidings and tells us no lies;
She sucks the sweet flowers to make her sing clear,
And she never sings "cuckoo" till summer is near.
O meeting is a pleasure, but parting a grief,
An inconstant lover is worse than a thief;
For a thief will but rob you and take all you have,
But an inconstant lover will bring you to the grave

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The grave it will rot you and bring you to dust,
There is not one in twenty young men girls can trust;
They will kiss you, and court you and swear to be true,
And the very next moment they'll bid you adieu.
Come all you young women wherever you be,
Build never your nest in the top of a tree;
For the leaves they will wither, the branches decay,
And the beauty of fair maids will soon fade away.