

# Folk Song: Barbara Allen

“Barbara Allen” is one of the most beloved and enduring folk songs in the English-speaking world. It's a simple, sorrowful tale of love and regret that has been sung for hundreds of years—and it still touches hearts today.

The song is about a young man who falls sick because he's in love with a woman named Barbara Allen. When she finally visits him on his deathbed, he tells her that he's dying of love for her. But Barbara doesn't show much kindness—at least, not at first. She walks away, but soon regrets it deeply. When she hears that he has died, her heart breaks. In most versions, she dies soon after from grief. It's a bittersweet reminder of how love and pride can collide—and how regrets can come too late.

No one knows exactly who first wrote “Barbara Allen,” but it dates all the way back to the 1600s in England and Scotland. It was passed down by word of mouth, sung by ordinary people in villages, towns, and countryside inns. As folks moved from place to place, they took the song with them. When English, Scottish, and Irish immigrants came to America, they brought “Barbara Allen” across the ocean. The song found a new home in the Appalachian Mountains, where it became a staple of American folk music.

Because it was passed down by ear, many versions of “Barbara Allen” exist. Some are long, with lots of verses, and some are short and sweet. The names and places might change, but the heart of the song stays the same: a story of love, sorrow, and the power of emotions left unspoken.

Over the years, “Barbara Allen” has been recorded by famous singers like Joan Baez and Bob Dylan, and continues to be sung in households throughout the world. It's a beautiful example of how folk music connects us—not just to our history, but to deep human feelings that never really change. It reminds us how stories, even sad ones, can bring people together and teach lessons that are just as true today as they were centuries ago.

# Barbara Allen Lyrics

In Scarlet Town, where I was bound,  
There was a fair maid dwelling,  
Whom I had chosen to be my own,  
And her name it was Barbara Allen.

All in the merry month of May,  
When green leaves they was springing,  
This young man on his death-bed lay,  
For the love of Barbara Allen.

He sent his man unto her then,  
To the town where she was dwelling:  
'You must come to my master dear,  
If your name be Barbara Allen.

'For death is printed in his face,  
And sorrow's in him dwelling,  
And you must come to my master dear,  
If your name be Barbara Allen.'

'If death be printed in his face,  
And sorrow's in him dwelling,  
Then little better shall he be  
For bonny Barbara Allen.'

So slowly, slowly she got up,  
And so slowly she came to him,  
And all she said when she came there,  
Young man, I think you are a dying.

He turnd his face unto her then:  
'If you be Barbara Allen,  
My dear,' said he, 'Come pitty me,  
As on my death-bed I am lying.'

'If on your death-bed you be lying,  
What is that to Barbara Allen?

I cannot keep you from [your] death;  
So farewell,' said Barbara Allen.

He turnd his face unto the wall,  
And death came creeping to him:  
'Then adieu, adieu, and adieu to all,  
And adieu to Barbara Allen!'

And as she was walking on a day,  
She heard the bell a ringing,  
And it did seem to ring to her  
'Unworthy Barbara Allen.'

She turnd herself round about,  
And she spy'd the corps a coming:  
'Lay down, lay down the corps of clay,  
That I may look upon him.'

And all the while she looked on,  
So loudly she lay laughing,  
While all her friends cry'd [out] amain,  
'Unworthy Barbara Allen!'

When he was dead, and laid in grave,  
Then death came creeping to she:  
'O mother, mother, make my bed,  
For his death hath quite undone me.

'A hard-hearted creature that I was,  
To slight one that lovd me so dearly;  
I wish I had been more kinder to him,  
The time of his life when he was near me.'

So this maid she then did dye,  
And desired to be buried by him,  
And repented her self before she dy'd,  
That ever she did deny him.

## BARBARA ALLEN

Traditional Tune

Edited and arranged by Granville Bantock

Lento cantabile

*mp espress.**cresc.*

VOICE

① In Scar - let Town where I was born, There  
 ② All in the mer - ry month of May, When  
 ③ He sent his man un - to her then To the

PIANO

*mp espress.**cresc.*

was a fair maid dwell - in', Made ev - 'ry youth cry  
 green buds they were swell - in', Young Jem - my Grove on his  
 town where she was dwell - in', "You must come to my

*mf espress.*

*dim.* "well - a - day," Her name was Bar - bara Al - len.  
 death - bed lay For love of Bar - bara Al - len.  
 mas - ter dear Giff your name be Bar - bara Al - len.

*poco rall.**p**dim.**poco rall.**p*

*mp espress.* *cresc.*

4. "For death is print - ed on his face And o'er his heart is  
5. Though death be print - ed on his face And o'er his heart is  
6. So slow - ly, slow - ly she came up, And slow - ly she came

*mp espress.* *cresc.*

*mf* *dim.* *poco rall.* *p*

steal-in',— Then haste a - way to — com-fort him,— O love - ly Bar - bara Al - len?"  
steal-in',— Yet lit - tle bet - ter — shall he be — For bon - ny Bar - bara Al - len.  
nigh him,— And all she said when — there she came:- "Young man, I think you're dy - ing."

*mf espress.* *dim.* *poco rall.* *p*

7.  
He turned his face unto her, straight,  
With deadly sorrow sighing:-  
"O lovely maid, come pity me;  
I'm on my death-bed lying."

8.  
"If on your death-bed you do lie,  
What needs the tale you're tellin';  
I cannot keep you from your death;  
Farewell," said Barbara Allen.

9.  
He turned his face unto the wall  
As deadly pangs he fell in;  
"Adieu! Adieu! Adieu to you all!  
Adieu to Barbara Allen!"

10.  
As she was walking o'er the fields  
She heard the bell a-knellin';  
And every stroke did seem to say,  
"Unworthy Barbara Allen!"

11.  
She turned her body round about  
And spied the corpse a-coming;  
"Lay down, lay down the corpse," she said,  
"That I may look upon him!"

12.  
With scornful eye she looked down,  
Her cheek with laughter swelling;  
Whilst all her friends cried out amain:-  
"Unworthy Barbara Allen!"

13.  
When he was dead and laid in grave  
Her heart was struck with sorrow;  
"O mother, mother, make my bed,  
For I shall die tomorrow.

14.  
"Hard-hearted creature him to slight  
Who loved me so dearly!  
O that I had been more kind to him  
When he was alive and near me!"

15.  
She, on her death-bed as she lay,  
Begged to be buried by him,  
And sore repented of the day  
That she did e'er deny him.

16.  
"Farewell," she said, "ye virgins all,  
And shun the fault I fell in;  
Henceforth take warning by the fall  
Of cruel Barbara Allen"