

Down In Yon Forest

Informant/Performer:
Unidentified informant
Cherokee County, NC

Source:
Niles, John Jacob
*Ten Christmas Carols from the
Southern Appalachian Mountains*
New York: G. Schirmer, 1935

1. Down in yon for - est be a hall,

Sing May, Queen May, sing Ma - - ry!

'Tis cov - er - li - ded o - ver with pur - ple and pall.

Sing all good men for the new - born Ba - by!

2. Oh in that hall is a pallet bed:
Sing May, Queen May, sing Mary!
'Tis stained with blood like cardinal red.
Sing all good men for the new-born Baby!
3. And at that pallet is a stone
Sing May, Queen May, sing Mary!
On which the Virgin did atone.
Sing all good men for the new-born Baby!
4. Under that Hall is a gushing flood:
Sing May, Queen May, sing Mary!
From Christ's own side 'tis water and blood.
Sing all good men for the new-born Baby!
5. Beside that bed a shrub tree grows,
Sing May, Queen May, sing Mary!
Since he was born hit blooms and blows
Sing all good men for the new-born Baby!
6. Oh, on that bed a young Lord sleeps,
Sing May, Queen May, sing Mary!
His wounds are sick, and see, he weeps.
Sing all good men for the new-born Baby!
7. Oh hail yon Hall where none can sin,
Sing May, Queen May, sing Mary!
Cause hit's gold outside and silver within,
Sing all good men for the new-born Baby!

Background Information

This striking version collected by John Jacob Niles in North Carolina is closely related to its counterparts, the English folk versions of the sixteenth-century text known as the Corpus Christi Carol (Balliol College, Oxford. MS. 354):

*Lully, lulley, lully, lulley,
The faucon hath borne my make away*

the mystical Eucharistic carol in the language and imagery of chivalry. The Scottish traditional version "The heron flew east, the heron flew west" is close to the English text. An English folk version from North Staffordshire is quoted by Sir Frank Sidgwick in *Notes and Queries* (1862); one from Derbyshire was published by Vaughan Williams. Peter Warlock (1894-1930) used the Balliol text in his modern setting.

The Derbyshire version has a direct reference to Christmas in the last verse only, one which seems to have been tacked on as ending on a more cheerful note after the preceding austere and sombre verses, a switch of mood paralleled in the last verse of the North Carolina version. The reference to the blossoming thorn in verse 5 Derbyshire and to the shrub in verse 5 North Carolina derives from the legend of the Holy Thorn of Glastonbury.

Elizabeth Poston, *Second Penguin Book of Christmas Carols*