

Skip to My Lou

Informant/Performer:
Jean Ritchie
Viper, KY

Source:
The Ritchie Family of Kentucky
Smithsonian Folkways FA 2316, 1959

Skip, skip, skip to my Lou,
Skip, skip, skip to my Lou,
Skip, skip to my Lou,
Skip to my Lou, my darlin'.

Transcribed by Gail Needleman

- 2: Grab your partner, skip to my Lou (3x)
Skip to my Lou, my darlin'.
- 3: Flies in the buttermilk, shoo shoo shoo (3x)
Skip to my Lou, my darlin'.
- 4: Home again, home again, skip to my Lou (3x)
Skip to my Lou, my darlin'.

Other traditional verses:

Little red wagon painted blue...
Chicken on the haystack, shoo shoo shoo...
Can't get a redbird, a bluebird'll do...
Lost my partner, what'll I do?...
Cat's in the cream jar, what'll I do?...
Needle in the haystack, two by two...
Sugar is sweet and so are you...
Kitten in the hay mow, mew mew mew...

In contrast to most of the old singing games, the words of this song did not determine any changes in the figures of the dance, so that the players were not forced to keep the words the same. As a consequence new verses were constantly being improvised, being usually built around the partner-stealing theme, which was the motive in the playing. Others often sung are the following:

Watch that green-horn steal my Lou!
Got me another one, prettier'n you!
Steal my girl and I'll steal one too!
Take her away from here; shoo, fly, shoo!

- L.L. McDowell, *Folk Dances of Tennessee*

Game Directions

A partner-stealing game. All partners stand together in one big circle, girls on the right of boys. The one who is "It" skips around inside the circle while the others sing, and he steals a partner from one of the couples. The person whose partner is stolen follows immediately, skipping round the ring and stealing another partner. Meanwhile, the first couple skip around until they return to the girl's place, where they rejoin the circle. This action is continuous, until the chorus is thrown in, at will, "Skip, skip, skip to my Lou," when all the couples join hands in promenade position and skip in a counter-clockwise circle, the one who is left without a partner skipping alone. At the end of this chorus, the big ring forms again and the game goes on as before with the stealer taking a partner wherever he will.

- from the liner notes