


# Pat O'Brien

Moderate (♩ = 100)



It's old and young a-round me come, you lov-ers all draw  
near. 'Tis a sad and dis-mal sto-ry I mean to let you  
hear con-cern-ing two lov-ers who were scarce-ly in their  
bloom when one of them was mur-dered, and the  
oth-er was hung last June.

Sung by Emerson Woodcock  
Peterborough, Ontario  
Collected by Edith Fowke, August 1957  
Transcribed by Peggy Seeger

It's old and young around me come, you lovers all draw near.  
'Tis a sad and dismal story I mean to let you hear  
Concerning two lovers who were scarcely in their bloom  
When one of them was murdered, and the other was hung last June.

One lover's name was Pat O'Brien, a carpenter by trade.  
Both day and night he took delight in courting this pretty fair maid  
Till he had gained her favors, and then he proved unkind;  
Some cursed advice or jealousy lay buried in his mind.

She wrote to him a letter and an answer to it came.  
Saying, "Nancy, dear Nancy, you cannot all me blame,  
For I've been working all the day and can't see you, my love;  
Your company I would like to have tonight all in the grove."

This maid being young and innocent, to meet him she did go.  
She dressed herself in privacy, I mean to let you know.  
She dressed herself in privacy, to meet him she did go,  
But little did this fair maid think he would prove her overthrow.

So when he saw her coming he strove from her to hide.  
Those very thoughts ran through his mind: "You ne'er shall be my bride,  
For I've been told by certainty that you deceived me.  
This very night I will take your life; your butcher I will be."

He grabbed her by the yellow locks and trailed her o'er the ground;  
He kicked her, he slashed her, gave her her deathly wound.  
Her dying words were: "Pat O'Brien, you cannot feel my pain."  
Then with a spade he dug her grave and then dashed out her brain.

So early next morning her ghost it did appear  
 And spoke unto her mother without grief or fear,  
 Saying, "Mother, dear mother, I can't see you no more,  
 For Pat O'Brien has murdered me and laid me in my gore.  
 "It's go ye down to yonder grove and there without delay,  
 And there will you find my body all buried up in clay,  
 And on the ground you will find my blood; 'twas there he murdered me.  
 Now take him up this very night and hanged he shall be."  
 So her mother went in search of her and soon her body found,  
 Enough to make the angels weep to see her deathly wound.  
 The crowds they gathered round her to see her deathly face,  
 While Pat O'Brien stooped over her as the blood dashed in his face.  
 So this young man was taken and soon conveyed to jail,  
 And there lay closely bolted in a dark and dismal cell.  
 The thoughts of this murder it grieved him full sore,  
 For every night this maid appeared all in her bloody gore.  
 "Since I've been imposed for to make an end, my age is twenty-four.  
 Fare you well, my tender parents, you can't see me no more.  
 So it's old and young around me come, and all you that stand by,  
 For 'twas I who murdered Nancy, and I'm willing for to die."

This Irish broadside ballad tells the very familiar story of a maid seduced and then murdered by her lover: essentially the same story told in "The Cruel Ship's Carpenter," "The Wexford Girl," "The Banks of the Old Pedee," and dozens of others. This form of it is rather rare: only a few traditional versions have previously been published: from New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine.

Mrs. Flanders, who printed the first text in *The Springfield Sunday Union* in 1931, says that Mrs. E.M. Sullivan of Springfield, Vermont, insists that "The Sorrowful Lamentations of Pat O'Brine" was about a murder that had occurred near her old home in County Cork. In 1935 Phillips Barry wrote in the *Bulleting of the Folksong Society of the Northeast* (No. 10, p.4), "'Pat O'Brien,' an Irish street ballad of the better type, has been current in the woods of the Northeast at least since the 1860's." The version he gives has fifteen stanzas of which Mr. Woodcock omits stanza 3 describing the girl, stanzas 7 and 8 in which she pleads for mercy, and stanza 15, a warning against jealousy.

Mr. Woodcock is the only one I have found who now remembers this ballad, but it must have been well known in Ontario in the last century for several phrases suggest that it served as a model for the local Ontario murder ballad about Michael Lee who killed Maggie Howie at Napanee around 1887 (see Folkways FM 4005).

For references, see G. Malcolm Laws, *American Ballads from British Broad-sides* (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1957), p. 271.

