

Flora and I

Sung by Mrs. Arlie Fraser, Lancaster, Ontario
Transcribed by Peggy Seeger

Collected by Edith Fowke, August 1961
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Like many songs from the last few centuries, "Flora and I" reflects the trauma of dislocation brought about by the Industrial Revolution and changing roles for women. Then as now, many men seem inclined to respond to this trauma by accusing women of failing to fulfil their prescribed social roles, specifically, in this case, of "immorality."

A common situation in ballads is that the man leaves the woman and his hometown, typically either to be a sailor or cowboy. If, as in "Lord Lovel," the deserted woman remains faithful and dies of a broken heart, the errant male will probably return and be remorseful, possibly even joining her in the coffin (not a consummation devoutly to be wished!). But the woman who is sensible and remarries, as in "The Trail to Mexico," can expect only vituperation and curses for her failure to remain faithful, despite the narrator's acknowledgement that he'd taken advantage of the "kindness" of the girls in the western town to which he'd travelled. How, then, could Flora expect anything else, having happily adjusted to the life of a relatively successful single woman, years before the advent of Betty Freidan or June Callwood?

Another version of this somewhat rare British ballad appears in Helen Creighton's *Maritime Folk Songs* under the title, "The Young Shepherd."

There n'er was a young man so Hap-py as
Me and my Flor-a, my Flor-a and I— I'll go to my
Flor-a and to her I will say:— When shall we mar-ry pray
tell me the day?

There never was a young man so happy as I—
Me and my Flora, my Flora and I.
I'll go to my Flora and to her I will say:
"When shall we be married, pray tell me the day?"

"To marry, to marry, kind sir, I'm too young.
To marry a shepherd my time has not come.
I'll first go to service and on my return
We shall be married if love carries on."

According to agreement to service she went.
To wait on a lady was Flora's intent—
To wait on a lady, a rich lady gay,
And Flora was clothed in costly array.

When six months were over and more time spent,
I wrote my love a letter to know her intent.
She wrote me back an answer that she led a happy life
And she never intended to become a shepherd's wife.

The reading of her letter grieved me full sore
And the writing of another one grieved me still more.
To think my false Flora could be so immoral
As the reading of her letters a thousand times tell!

I once was a young man as red as a rose:
Now I'm as pale as the lily that grows,
Like a rose in the garden all withered and gone—
You see what I've come to by loving too young.