LET ME FALL
Old Time Bluegrass from the Virginia-North Carolina Border

CULLEN GALYEAN, banjo  BOBBY HARRISON, guitar

Recorded by Eric Davidson at Pipers Gap, VA, August 1983

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE
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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET
FOLKWAYS RECORDS FS 3910
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Recorded by Eric R. Davidson in Woodlawn, Va.,
August, 1963

Notes by Paul Newman, Paul Tyler and Eric Davidson

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Introduction to this Record.

Culien Galyen (banjo) and Bobby Harrison (guitar) have been featured on several previous Folkways albums. In most of these recordings their music is heard in the context of a full bluegrass band; the Virginia Mountain Boys, which has usually included a fiddler, mandolin, and a second guitar. Here, these two old time musicians perform with no additional accompaniment, and the listener can appreciate in pure form the skillful interplay between their voices, and their own two instruments. The traditional material that Cullen and Bobby interpret for us with the banjo and fiddle, and from specific 19th Century songs. The remaining songs are of archaic traditional origin. Among these are the Southern Virginia classics "Sally Ann" and "Soldier's Joy", which are old banjo-fiddle dance tunes; a version of the famous ballad "Wagoner's Lad", here titled "My Horses Ain't Hungry", the lament "Lonesome Day"; and the amusing hunting song "Groundhog". This blending of varied sources is one of the most interesting and musically appealing aspects of the string band music of this area of the Appalachians, both the traditional string bands, and the old time bluegrass bands that largely supplanted these thirty to forty years ago.

Except where noted, in all of the selections on this record, Cullen Galyen is heard playing the banjo, and Bobby Harrison the guitar.

SIDE I


Though this song goes by a number of titles -- such as "Farewell, Sweet Mary", "Loving Nancy", and "Texas Cowboy" -- it is most often known as "The Wagoners Lad." In the most common stanza, the young woman tells the lad:

Go put up your horses and feed them some hay,
And sit you beside me I know you can stay.

To this request he usually responds in the manner of stanzas one and five below. This theme is also frequently found in the song complex known as "Old Songs." And as in the latter, the wagoner lad usually leaves Nancy for Georgia where, he says, "My mind is to marry and leave you behind." Galyen and Harrison's version of "The Wagoners Lad," however, is one of the very few in which the young woman bids her parents goodbye in order to drive off with the lad. A similar story is told in one text printed in the Brown collection (#250 C); ** and another was recorded for Bennett in 1931 by A.B. Thompson and Bob Crabford of the Red Fox Chasers of Surry County, North Carolina under the title "Pretty Polly" (reissued on County 573). Jeneer recordings of "The Wagoners Lad" include Bascom Lamar Lunsford's 1935 version for the Archive of American Folk Song (1766-ML), Kelly Harrell's 1925 Victor disc (Victor 2103, reissued on Bear Family 15509), and Buel Kaze's 1928 rendition for Brunswick (064, reissued on Folkways PA2951).

1) I met this fair maiden while traveling one day,
Her name was Polly, or so she did say.
My horses ain't hungry, they won't eat your hay;
So fare you well, Polly, I'm going on my way.

2) Your parents don't like me they say I'm too poor.
They say I'm not worthy to enter your door.
I know they don't like you, but what do you care?
I know you're my Polly, you know I'm your dear.

3) I know you're my Polly, but what can I say?
So come, go with me, we'll speed on our way.
Yes, I'll go with you, you're poor I am told.
It's your love that I'm wanting, not silver or gold.

4) We'll load our belongings, we'll drive till we come
To some little cabin, we'll call it our home.
I hate to leave mama, she treats me so kind,
But I do as I promised that Johnny of mine.

5) So goodbye dear mama, I'm leaving today.
We'll journey to father and speed on our way.
My horses ain't hungry, they won't eat your hay,
I'll drive on to Georgia and be on my way.

*Lunsford and Strimfield, p.20-21.
**Brown Collection, III, p.278; see also the headnotes for #258 (p.275) for a list of other printed references.


Written jointly by Ralph and Carter Stanley, this song was first recorded by the Stanley Brothers and the Clinch Mountain Boys for Columbia in 1949 or 1950, but unissued for over 25 years until Rounder reissued all 22 sides the brothers did for Columbia (Rounder SS09 and SS10). Probably the first issue of "Life of Sorrow" by the Stanley Brothers was the American Folk Song Society version recorded for Mercury in the mid-1950's (Mercury 71258). The only other recording to be reported is by
Larry Sparks' and the Lonesome Ramblers (King Bluegrass 55 and Rebel 1609). The song is very closely related to the better known lament "Man of Constant Sorrow" with which it shares some words and also the melody and harmonies. In this performance, Sparks was the first singer to be chosen by Ralph to fill Carter's shoes after the latter's death in 1966.

1) After traveling through this world of sorrow, No one on earth to call my friend, I'm on my way back to old Kentucky, Where I met and loved, but couldn't win.

2) I have always loved you little darling, My heart will always feel the same. I could never do one thing to hurt you, I'd rather die than bring you shame.

3) When the cold shroud is wrapped around me They lay my weary head to rest; Will you stand around and gaze upon me? For I'm the boy who loved you best.

4) Your golden hair has turned to silver, Virginia, including four from the Galax area: the Galax String Band (1348Bl) and an unidentified string band with Wade Low Gap, North Carolina musician: Bascom Lamar Lunsford of Buncombe County (9480B3). The song is very closely related to one legend, the tune was fiddled by a condemned man to his Blue Grass Boys in Nashville in 1966 (Decca 4896), and the earlier version the Monroe Brothers waxed for Bluebird (8-8960), reissued on ARKA-5510). Archie Green has traced the history of this song back to a 1928 recording by Charles Bowman and his Brothers (Columbia 15357-D) of a song they put together and set to a melody modelled after the breakdown piece "Rock About My Baro Jane". The phrases "roll on, buddy" and "roll so slow" are also found in the chorus of "Nine Pound Hammer", which is today associated with Merle Travis (Capitol 48000, AD-50).

3) My mother has gone up to heaven, My father has gone there I know, My sister has gone off to her mother, And where I am nobody knows.

4) You're sweet as the flowers in springtime, You're as pure as the dew from the rose, I'd rather be somebody's darling, Than a poor boy that nobody knows.

Chorus: *Horston, p.78.*

5. "Roll On, Buddy". Voc: Cullen Galyean, with Bobby Harrison. The melody and chorus of Galyean and Harrison's "Roll On, Buddy" is derived from Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys recording of the song for Decca (DL4896), and the earlier version the Monroe Brothers waxed for Bluebird (8-8960), reissued on ARKA-5510). Archie Green has traced the history of this song back to a 1928 recording by Charles Bowman and his Brothers (Columbia 15357-D) of a song they put together and set to a melody modelled after the breakdown piece "Rock About My Baro Jane". The phrases "roll on, buddy" and "roll so slow" are also found in the chorus of "Nine Pound Hammer", which is today associated with Merle Travis (Capitol 48000, AD-50).

Chorus: *Horston, p.78.*
White dove will mourn in sorrow,
This bird will song in their nest.
I'll live my life in sorrow,
Since mother and daddy are dead.

2) As we were all so happy there together,
In our peaceful little mountain home.
But troubles near are angels in heaven,
Now they sing around that great white throne.

(Side 2)

1. "Ground hog". Voc: Cullen Galyean. Of the 13 versions of this tune included, one titled "whistle-pig", another name for the creature, that might be the same song -- held by the Archive of American Folk Song in 1940, most came from North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee, though a few hailed from Texas and one was from California. The song was not often recorded, if at all, in the early days of commercial country music; but the early recording was by a Bradley Kincaid, who released it in the second of his very popular song folios that he advertised on his broadcasts over WLS-Chicago and other radio stations. Recordings on Carolina musicians include that by Bascom Lamar Lunsford made in 1935 for the Library of Congress (180184). Doc Watson's version performed with other family members for Folkways (FA2366), and Tommy Jarrell's text backed up by his fiddling, with accompanying banjo by Fred Cockerham or Oscar Jenkins, for County (712). A most interesting rendition from nearby Grayson County is by the Virginia musician Vester Jones (Folkways FS3811).

1) Run here, Sal, with a great long pole,
Run here, Sal, with a great long pole,
Twist that ground hog out of his hole,
Ground hog.

(Side 2)

1) "Lonesome Day". Voc: Bobby Harrison; Cullen Galyean, fiddle. A.P. Carter is credited as the composer of "Sad and Lonesome Days" which the Carter Family recorded in New York in 1935 for ARC (Conqueror 8644, Harmony HL-7344); but he more than likely obtained the song, at least in part, from traditional sources. Early in the 1940s, Woody Guthrie, Cisco Houston and Sonny Terry recorded "Lonesome Day" for Folkways (reissued on Tradition 2058). A traditional version of this song was recorded by Ruby Vass (Folkways/Asch AN3611). Bluegrass versions have been recorded by Red Allen for Rebel (reissued on County 749), the Country Gentlemen (Mercury MG20585), and Larry Sparks and the Lonesome Ramblers (Time Tree SLP-509). Galyean and Harrison's version forsoaks the funerary stanzas of A.P. Carter's song -- "They carried my girl to the burying ground" and "Goin' to my grave with a silver spade" -- in favor of other floating stanzas, such as the "lonesome dove" stanza found also in the Monroe Brothers' "All the Good Times Are Passed and Gone" (reissued on Bluebird AXM-5510, and recorded by Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys, WCA-116).

(Side 2)

2. "Sally Ann". Instrumental. banjo solo. The fiddle and banjo tune that perhaps best characterizes the area of the Blue Ridge Mountains from North Carolina up to Galax, Virginia and beyond is "Sally Ann". Nearly every recorded version of the tune was made by, or derived from, a musician who comes from this area of the southern Appalachians. For example, of the five recordings on deposit at the Archive of American Folk Song in 1940, three were by musicians from this area of Virginia (two from Galax) and another was by western North Carolina musician Bascom Lamar Lunsford, whose at least six of the songs heard on this album. A list of contemporary recordings of "Sally Ann" reads like a "Who's Who" of Blue Ridge instrumentalists; fiddlers Tommy Jarrell first with Kyle Creed (Mountain 102), and then Oscar Jenkins on banjo driven by the Earl Doen (Pine Ridge Boys); as well as banjoists Clell Caudill (Rounder 0058), Sidny Myers with his brother Fulton on fiddle (County 717), and Wade Ward (Folkways FA2380). A bluegrass version of the tune can be heard on the Folkways recordings of the 1961 Union Grove Fiddlers' Convention (FA 2343) performed by the Mountain Ramblers, a group to which Cullen Galyean once belonged.

3) Have you ever heard a church bell chime?
Have you ever heard a church bell chime?
Have you ever heard a church bell chime?
It makes me think of days gone by.

*(Atkins, pp. 97-99)*
Mister?" (Columbia 15028-D, reissued on County 509). Bascom Lamar Lunsford of Buncombe County, North Carolina recorded it for the Library of Congress in 1935 under the same title. Ernest V. Stoneeman of Galax, however, recorded it in 1926 as "May I Sleep..." ([Gennett 3368, Challenge 153, Hervin 75530]). Other early country artists who have put the song on wax include Wiff Carter (Montana Slim) for Victor (reissued on RCA Camden CAS 2490), Chumbler's Breakdown Band for ORS (9011-1, PM 13200), and Bill Williams and Bill Morgan -- the former was Walter Smith of Carroll County, Virginia -- for ABC (9016-1, "Perfect A"). More recent recordings are found on LPs by MacNissiean (CMH 9001) and the McPeak Brothers (RCA APL-0587). The song has remained strong in oral tradition as evidenced by the five texts collected in Virginia in the late 1930s by WPA workers,** and the recent field recordings of Grandma Davis from Roaring River, North Carolina (Folkways PA 2434) and reformed Tennessee moonshiner Hamper McBe (Rounder 0061).

(Chorus)

May I sleep in your barn tonight, mister? For it's cold lying out on the ground; For the cold north wind it is howling, And I have no place to lie down.

1) It was three years ago this last summer, I shall never forget that sad day; When a stranger came out from the city, He was tall, so handsome and gay.

(Chorus)

2) The stranger was both tall and handsome, He looked like a man who had wealth, He wanted to stop in the country, He wanted to stop for his health.

(Chorus)

3) I have no pipe nor tobacco, And I have no matches to burn, I assure you no harm sir, kind mister, If you only let me sleep in your barn.

(Chorus: twice)

*rosenbarn, p.352. **rosenberg.

6. "Reuben". Voc: Cullen Galyean, with Bobby Harrison. Any discussion of "Reuben" must also take into account the pieces known as "Train 45" and "900 Miles." * "Train 45" is mostly performed as an instrumental, but the title "Reuben" is also given to instrumental versions by some banjo pickers: e.g., Ola Belle Reed (Heritage VI), a twin banjo version by the Blue Grass Mountain Boys (Folkways FA2454), and Uncle Wade Ward (Folkways FA2380). According to a bluegrass legend, "Reuben" is the tumor young Earl Scruggs was playing around with when he "ducked onto his unique style of three-finger pickin": "Reuben's Train" and "Nine Hundred Miles" commonly refer to settings of a number of floating stanzas. In this discussion of lyric couplets, Cohen has posed the question whether they represent separate songs that have lately merged, or if they are in fact independent songs that evolved from a single source. Galyean and Harrison's version contains stanzas that are associated with both titles. Following Cohen's lead, stanza one and the chorus should be associated with the "Reuben" complex, stanzas two to four and six with "900 Miles", while stanza five should be regarded as a recent addition. Appended to Cohen's discussion is a list of more than three hundred references-both printed and recorded-for the three titles, including a section on "Ruby, Are You Mad at Your Man?" A few relevant selections from this list include "Train No. 45" by Grayson and Whitet (Victor 21189, Bluebird B-5498), reissued on Old-Time Yesteryears (Folkways FA2454); "Reuben" by Silas Flatt, Earl Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys (Columbia CS 6346 and EK1041); "Old Ruby" by Vester Jones (Folkways FS 3811)."