

The Water is Wide



1. The water is wide, I cannot get o'er
And neither have I wings to fly.
O go and get me some little boat,
To carry o'er my true love and I.
2. A-down in the meadows the other day
A-gath'ring flow'rs both fine and gay
A-gath'ring flowers, both red and blue,
I little thought what love could do.
3. I put my hand into one soft bush,
Thinking the sweetest flow'r to find.
I prick'd my finger to the bone
And left the sweetest flow'r alone.
4. I lean'd my back up against some oak,
Thinking it was a trusty tree.
But first he bended then he broke,
So did my love prove false to me.
5. Where love is planted, O there it grows,
It buds and blossoms like some rose;
It has a sweet and pleasant smell,
No flow'r on earth can it excel.
6. Must I be bound, O and she go free!
Must I love one thing that does not love me!
Why should I act such a childish part,
And love a girl that will break my heart.
7. There is a ship sailing on the sea,
She's loaded deep as deep can be,
But not so deep as in love I am;
I care not if I sink or swim.
8. O love is handsome and love is fine,
And love is charming when it is true;
As it grows older it groweth colder
And fades away like the morning dew.

This song and melody are known in multiple variations and used in multiple settings. The flowing melody is popular with classical singers as well as folk and hymn singers. The roots of this song seem to go back to Scotland where it is known as "O Waly, Waly". A version of it that begins "Waly, Waly, Gin Love Be Bonny" is in Ramsay's **Tea Table Miscellany** of 1724. Cecil Sharp collected at least five versions of this song and published it in **Folk Songs From Somerset** (1906) and also in **One Hundred English Folksongs** (1916). The verses about failing love are related to the family of songs that include "On Top of Old Smokey", "The Wagoner's Lad" and "The Butcher's Boy".

It has been recorded in numerous styles by many singers under both titles: Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Enya, Steeleye Span and The Kingston Trio ("The River is Wide") and many others.