

900 Miles

900 miles is a song from the early 1900s and one of the most haunting and beautiful blues of the railroad....

I am walking down this track, I've got tears in my eyes, I'm trying to read a letter from my home. Well, if this train runs me right, I'll be home tomorrow night, 'cause I'm 900 miles from my home. Well, this train that I ride on is a hundred coaches long, I can hear her whistle blow a million miles. But if this train runs me right I'll see my man tomorrow night, 'cause I'm 900 miles from my home. Lord, I hate to hear that whistle blow, that long lonesome train whistling down. I will pawn you my wagon, I will pawn you my team, I will pawn you my watch and my chain. 'Cause if this train runs me right I'll be home tomorrow night, 'cause I'm 900 miles from my home. Lord, I hate to hear that whistle blow, that long lonesome train whistling down. I am walking down this track, I've got tears in my eyes, I'm trying to read a letter from my home. And if this train runs me right, I'll be home tomorrow night, 'cause I'm 900 miles from my home.

East Virginia

Sometimes it seems that there are actually just a few folk songs which, over the centuries, have been re-written and braided together into one long song. East Virginia, an Appalachian mountain song with roots in 17th century England, has an identical melody to "Wayfaring Stranger", "Dark Holler Blues" and "Red Rosy Bush" (as well as some of the same lyrics). Our favorite verse didn't make it onto this recording... but it goes "Wish I was a swallow flying to a high and lonesome place. I'd join the wild birds in their flying, circling on the wind's embrace."

I was born in East Virginia, North Carolina I did roam. There I met a fair young maiden whose name and age I did not know. Her hair it was of coal black color. Her lips they were ruby red. And on her breast she wore white lilies, where I long to lay my head. See I don't want your greenback dollar. No, I don't want your silver chain. All I want is your love darlin'. Won't you take me back again? I was born in East Virginia, North Carolina I did roam. There I met a fair young maiden whose name and age I did not know.

Linin' Track

This is an old railroad work song first recorded in the prisons of Tennessee in 1933. The rhythm of the work chant was used to pace the work, pull and lift in unison, and to make the day pass more quickly. But the central mystery of the song is Eloise... some say that Eloise might have been the nickname for the flat car that carried the rails. Others say that the line should be transcribed "Siello Huisco linin' track". Huisco was a Mexican prison-reformer who worked in the USA c1900. Leadbelly himself talks about Ella Louise

as a woman who is calling out the lead, directing the other workers how to line the track....

Oh boys cancha line ‘em. Oh boys cancha line. Oh boys cancha line ‘em. See Eloise go linin’ track.

Down in the hollow, below the field, angels are working on my chariot wheel. Mary and the baby they’re sitting in the shade, thinkin’ ‘bout the money that I ain’t made. Oh boys cancha line ‘em. See Eloise go linin’ track. Moses stood on the red sea shore batting at the waves with a 2 by 4. If I could I surely would, I’d stand on the rock where Moses stood. Oh boys cancha line ‘em. See Eloise go linin’ track. Mary and Mark, Luke and John... well all them disciples now they’re dead and gone. You keep talking ‘bout the break ahead but you ain’t said nothin’ ‘bout my daily bread. Oh boys cancha line ‘em. See Eloise go linin’ track.

The Swallow

This song reportedly comes from the British Isles via New Foundland, Canada. There are many versions with many additional verses that tell the story of a woman whose lover has left her. She is carrying his child, and goes down to the garden to pick primrose, an herb traditionally used to terminate pregnancy. In the end, she lays down silently, her heart broken by both man and child.

She’s like the swallow that flies so high. She’s like the river that never runs dry. She’s like the sunshine on the lee shore. She loves her love but love is no more. It was out in the garden this fair maid did go, picking the beautiful primrose. The more she plucked, the more she pulled, her apron red with petals full. Then out of these roses she made a bed, as stone for a pillow for her head. She lays her down, no word she spoke, until for love her heart broke.

St. James Infirmary

This is one of the classic songs of New Orleans, which has its roots in an Irish ballad, “The Unfortunate Rake.” There are jazz versions, Celtic versions and even French Cajun versions. The cause of the young woman’s death is unclear, but after Hurricane Katrina, the St. James Infirmary blues took on an entirely different meaning

I went down to St. James Infirmary to see my baby there. She was stretched out on a long white table; so cold, so pretty, so fair. Let her go. Let her go. God Bless her, wherever she may be. You can search the whole wide world over, but you’ll never find a guy like me. There are sixteen coal black horses, there are tied to a rubber tired hock. There are eleven girls who are going to the graveyard, but only ten of them are coming back. When I die please please please bury me in my wide brimmed Stetson hat. Lay a five dollar gold piece on my watch chain, so they know that I never looked back. Let her go. Let her

go. God Bless her, wherever she may be. You can search the whole wide world over, but you'll never find a guy like me. No you'll never find a guy like me.

Isn't That So?

Didn't he know what he was doing when he put eyes to my head? If he didn't want me watching all those men, he would have left my eyeballs dead. Isn't that So? Isn't that So? You've gotta go where your heart say go. Isn't that so? Didn't he know what he was doing when he created the magic vine? His own son got a reputation of turning water into wine. Isn't that So? Isn't that so? You've gotta go where your heart says go. Isn't that so? Oh line of least resistance lead me on. Oh line of least resistance lead me on. Lead me on. Lead me on. Didn't he know what he was doing when he divided the high and the low. You've got to bury the seed in the earth my friend if you want the thing to grow. Isn't that so? Isn't that so? You've gotta go where your heart say go. Isn't that so? Oh line of least resistance lead me on. Oh line of least resistance lead me on. Lead me on. Lead me on.

If I Had My Way

You read about Samson, you read about his birth. He was the strongest man that ever lived on earth. One day as Samson was walking alone, he looked down on the ground, he saw an old jawbone. He lifted up that jawbone and swung it over his head and when he got to moving ten thousand was dead. If I had my way, if I had my way, if I had my way in this wicked world, I would tear this building down. Samson and the lion got in attack. Samson he crawled up on the lion's back. You read about this lion, killed a man with his paw. Well Samson he got his hands around the lion's jaw. He ripped that beast till the lion was dead, and the bees made honey in the lion's head. If I had my way, if I had my way, if I had my way in this wicked world, I would tear this building down. Delilah was a woman, she was fine and fair. She had lovely looks, God knows, and coal black hair. Delilah she climbed up on Samson's knee. She said tell me where your strength lies, if you please. She talked so fine. She talked so fair. Samson said Delilah, cut off my hair. Shave my head just as clean as your hand, and my strength will be like a natural man. If I had my way, if I had my way, if I had my way in this wicked world, I would tear this building down.

No More Songs

Hello, hello, hello.... Is there anybody home? I only called to say I'm sorry. The drums are in the dawn and all the voices gone and it seems that there are no more songs. Once I knew a girl, she was a flower in a flame. I loved her as the world, sing sadly. Now the ashes of a dream are found in magazines, and it seems that there are no more songs. Once I knew a sage who sang upon the stage. He told about the world, his lover. Now a ghost

without a name stands ragged in the rain, and it seems that there are no more songs. The rebels they were here. They came inside the door. They told me that the world was bleeding. Then all to my surprise, they took away my eyes and it seems that there are no more songs. A star is in the sky. It's time to say goodbye. A whale is on the beach. He's dying. A white bone in the sand, a white flag in my hand, and it seems that there are no more songs.

Asturiana

This is a traditional Spanish folk lament of love which translates: “To see if I could be consoled, tie me to a green pine. To see if I could be consoled. To see me weep... oh how the pine was green... to see me weeping. “

Por ver si me consolaba, arrimame a un pino verde. Por ver si me consolaba. Por ver me llorar, llorar. Y el pino como era verde. Por ver me llorar, lloraba.