

The Wild River Tragedy

The musical score is written on three staves in a treble clef, 6/8 time signature, and a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The lyrics are printed below the notes.

Hear the mourn - ful ti - dings sound, See the or - phans weep - ing round,
Fa - ther, mo - ther, where are they? In one mo - ment snatched a - way,
From our fond em - brace have gone, Ne - ver, ne - ver to re - turn.

Father, we were children three
With our hearts bound up in thee.
How you'd smile to see us play
Around your knees from day to day;
Little did our youthful hearts
Think that we so soon must part.

Happy days and years have been.
Fondly you loved mother then;
How she sweetly on you smiled,
How for her and us you toiled.
Blissful season, happy time,
But a killing frost has come.

Tell us, father, why did you
Such a deed of murder do?
Tell us, till your latest breath,
Till your eyes are closed death,
Every dark heart's rending woe
You were called to undergo.

Yes, I'll tell you children dear
All my grief and sorrow here,
Why I take away my life
And with me must die my wife.
Worthley, did he longer wait,
Would have shared our awful fate.

In the autumn of last year
Samuel Worthley did appear,
Clothed in smiles and rich array,
Kind and social every way.
His approach I hailed with joy
And I worked in his employ.

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Like the lark, at early dawn
I resumed my work each morn
Happy with a lovely wife,
Enjoying all the sweets of life,
But by fate I'm doomed to meet
Bitterness for every sweet.

Must I tell my tale of woe?
Worthley intimate did grow
With the only one I love,
Whose vows are registered above.
Willingly my wife complies
Severing all my earthly ties.

She began with him to ride,
Smiled and chatted by his side;
Innocent they seemed to be,
All the time 'twas killing me.
Oh, what pangs I did endure
Till suspicions all were sure.

Down to Bethel Hill they went,
At a ball the evening spent.
They returned late in the night,
In the kitchen struck a light;
From my bed I then arose
To the kitchen window goes.

Through the casement I could view
Everything that they could do,
How he hugged her to his breast,
On her lips sweet kisses pressed.
Smilingly she did remain
Hugged, and kissing back again.

To the kitchen then I went
Further conduct to prevent.
"Wife," said I, "what can this mean?
Such vile conduct is obscene."
"Clear, you sneaking scamp," said she,
"You are always watching me."

Jealous frenzy surged on me,
Worthley's murderer I must be;
Well I learned during the day
On the bed which side he lay;
Through the glass a drill I run
Through the pane to point my gun.

But that gloomy afternoon
Down to Bethel he had gone.
He did not return that day,
To New York he took his way,
Thus, by chance, his life did save
From a dark, untimely grave.

Soon a trunk to Bethel came,
On the lid was marked my name.
Latham brought the trunk to me,
In my hand he placed the key;
Where no other one could see
I unlocked the mystery.

Children's clothing there I found
Suited to my children round,
Underneath a letter lay
Snugly sealed in every way.
Soon I broke the seal and read,
"Mrs. Freeman, I will wed.

"Come, my love, oh, come away
To New York without delay,
You and children quickly come;
I'll provide a splendid home.
You my loving bride will be,
I will live and worship thee."

Here despair had seized my soul,
Grief and horror filled my bowl,
All my hopes did here impart,
Blood was curdling round my heart,
Frozen up was every vein.
Oh, my agony and pain!

Oh, my God! I'm left alone
And shall stand before God's throne.
Ere tomorrow's sun shall rise
We will meet you in the skies;
I cannot my wife resign,
But must take her life and mine.

I prepared the deed to do
With my gun and razor, too.
When night's mantle o'er was spread,
She lay slumbering on her bed;
I approached her couch of rest,
Aimed to shoot her in the breast.

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When I fired I quickly run,
 Loaded up again my gun,
 Fired it off myself to kill,
 Found myself yet living still.
 This is all I here can tell,
 Lovely children, fare you well.

Freeman's body soon was found
 On the widow Lary's ground.
 What a scene did there appear!
 Throat being cut from ear to ear.
 Long we looked with sad affright
 Viewing such a horrid sight.

Mrs. Freeman yet did live
 Her fond husband to forgive.
 "What a guilty wretch am I,
 Well I now deserve to die;
 Worthley innocent has been,
 James and I had laid the plan.

"Oh, my brother, could you know
 All the pangs I undergo,
 Laid upon this bed of death
 Soon to yield my vital breath,
 Mind and body. Oh, what pain!
 All my future hopes in vain.

"You and I have been combined,
 You have led my willing mind
 From the path of rectitude;
 Now I seal it with my blood.
 I must die, but you will live.
 James, repent; I will forgive."

For twelve long hours she did remain
 In great agony and pain.
 Then resigned her vital breath
 To the hand of potent death,
 Crying, "Shun that dark abyss
 Which has led me on to this."

Note: This song was written about a real tragedy that happened many years ago. Charles Freeman of Gilead, Maine, shot his wife and then killed himself on the Morning of July 11, 1851. The song, I am told, was written by Orrison Drake. The circumstances were just as they are described in the song: one of Mrs. Freeman's brothers was in sympathy with the husband, while the other, James, urged her to encourage Worthley.

My brother, Jim Spinney, sang the song.