

# GREENSLEEVES (traditional English folk song)

Em D G D Bm c°  
Alas, my love, you do me wrong, to  
Em C B7 B7  
cast me off discourteously. For  
Em D G D Bm c°  
I have loved you well and long, De  
Em B7 Em Em  
Lighting in your company.

Chorus:

Bm G D Bm Co  
Greensleeves was all my joy  
Em C B7 B7  
Greensleeves was my delight,  
Bm G D Bm c°  
Greensleeves was my heart of gold, and  
Em Am B7 Em Em  
Who but my lady Greensleeves?

Your vows you've broken, like my heart,  
Oh, why did you so enrapture me?  
Now I remain in a world apart  
But my heart remains in captivity.

I have been ready at your hand,  
To grant whatever you would crave,  
I have both wagered life and land,  
Your love and good-will for to have.

If you intend thus to disdain,  
It does the more enrapture me,  
And even so, I still remain  
A lover in captivity.

My men were clothed all in green,  
And they did ever wait on thee;  
All this was gallant to be seen,  
And yet thou wouldst not love me.

Thou couldst desire no earthly thing,  
But still thou hadst it readily.  
Thy music still to play and sing;  
And yet thou wouldst not love me.

Well, I will pray to God on high,  
That thou my constancy mayst see,  
And that yet once before I die,  
Thou wilt vouchsafe to love me.

Ah, Greensleeves, now farewell, adieu,  
To God I pray to prosper thee,  
For I am still thy lover true,  
Come once again and love me.

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The old year now away is fled, the new year it is entered;  
Then let us all our sins down tread, and joyfully all appear.  
Let's merry be this holiday, and let us run with sport and play,  
Hang sorrow, let's cast care away -- God send us a merry new year!

And now with new year's gifts each friend unto each other they do send;  
God grant we may our lives amend, and that truth may now appear.  
Now like the snake cast off your skin of evil thoughts and wicked sin,  
And to amend this new year begin -- God send us a merry new year!

And now let all the company in friendly manner all agree,  
For we are here welcome all may see unto this jolly good cheer.  
I thank my master and my dame, the which are founders of the same,  
To eat and drink now is no shame -- God send you a happy new year!

Come lads and lasses every one, Jack, Tom, Dick, Bess, Mary and Joan,  
Let's cut the meat unto the bone, for welcome you need not fear.  
And here for good liquor you shall not lack, 'twill whet my brains and strengthen my back  
This jolly good cheer it must go to wrack -- God send us a happy new year!

Come give us good liquor when I do call, I'll drink to each one in this hall,  
I hope that loud I must not bawl, so unto me lend an ear.  
Good fortune to my master send, and to our dame which is our friend,  
God bless us all, and so I end -- God send us a happy new year!

"Greensleeves" is a traditional [English folk song](#) and tune, basically a ground of the form called a *romanesca*.

A [broadsheet ballad](#) by this name was registered at the London Stationer's Company in 1580 as "A New Northern Dittie of the Lady Greene Sleeves." No copy of that printing is known. It appears in the surviving *A Handful of Pleasant Delights* (1584) as "A New Courtly Sonnet of the Lady Green Sleeves. To the new tune of Green sleeves." It remains debatable whether this suggests that an 'old' tune of "Greensleeves" was in circulation, or which one our familiar tune is. Many surviving sets of lyrics were written to this tune.

The tune is also found in several late 16th century and early 17th century sources, such as [Ballet's MS Lute Book](#) and [Het Luitboek van Thysius](#), as well as various manuscripts preserved in the [Cambridge University libraries](#).

A widely-believed (but completely unproven) legend is that it was composed by [King Henry VIII](#) (1491-1547) for his lover and future [queen consort Anne Boleyn](#). Anne, the youngest daughter of [Thomas Boleyn](#), rejected Henry's attempts to seduce her. This rejection is apparently referred to in the song, when the writer's love "cast me off discourteously." However, it is most unlikely that King Henry VIII wrote it, as the song is written in a style which was not known in England until after Henry VIII died.

It is widely acknowledged that Lady Green Sleeves was at the very least a promiscuous young woman and perhaps a prostitute.<sup>[1]</sup> The reference to the colour of her sleeves suggests grass stains from a recent rendezvous with a suitor. Additionally, in England the colour green was associated with prostitution. It is said that the green sleeves were removable and required to be worn by prostitutes as a label of their profession.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

An alternative explanation is that Lady Green Sleeves was, as a result of her attire, incorrectly assumed to be immoral. Her "discourteous" rejection of the singer's advances quite clearly makes the point that she is not.<sup>[2]</sup>