FRANKIE ARMSTRONG
Lovely On The Water

Frankie Armstrong
Jeff Lowe *concertina, baritone concertina, recorder, whistle, dulcimer*
Jack Warshaw *guitar, dulcimer, banjo*

1	**Tarry Trousers**	*with concertina and guitar*
2	**The Green Valley**	
3	**Low Down in the Broom**	*with recorder*
4	**The Cruel Mother**	
5	**The Crafty Maid's Policy**	*with whistle*
6	**The Maid on the Shore**	
7	**The Frog and the Mouse**	*with banjo and concertina*
8	**Lovely on the Water**	*with concertina*
9	**The Brown Girl**	
10	**The Young Girl Cut Down in her Prime**	*with baritone concertina*
11	**The Unquiet Grave**	
12	**The Saucy Sailor**	*with concertina*
13	**The Two Sisters**	*with two dulcimers*

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Produced by A. L. Lloyd
Notes by A. L. Lloyd
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More or less by chance, this record turns out to be concerned almost entirely with contrasting aspects of love. In folk songs as in life, love shows a hundred faces, smiling or sulking, despairing, exultant, welcoming a love found, resigned or vengeful over a love lost. Love glorious, love comic, love tragic, but seldom love ridiculous. Frankie Armstrong offers us a few of these varied faces here, sweet, bitter, gentle, savage, but always convincing.

Frankie Armstrong, born in Cumberland, but brought up in the South, is one of the most admired girl singers in the folk song revival. Looks lovely, is sweet natured, and - what matters here - she can sing to pull down the stars. She has the gift of being able to pass easily and convincingly from lightness to tragedy - a rare gift indeed, in a world where most girl singers are either trivial as candy floss or goddam gum, with nothing in between. Typically enough, she came to folk song as a school girl, performing an American repertory with a skiffle group. A little later the group reformed as The Ceilidh Singers, using mainly British songs. When the Ceilidh Singers broke up in 1964 Frankie sang in the folk song clubs for a year or two in company with Louis Killen, before striking out entirely on her own. Now she is known and welcomed in folk song clubs and at festivals all over the country and in Scotland too, whenever her job as a social worker (first with the blind and currently with drug addicts) permits. She has frequently sung in radio programmes and is no stranger to T.V. Another Topic record on which she appears is The Bird in the Bush (12T135) with Anne Briggs and A. L. Lloyd.

1 Tarry Trousers
Mother-daughter dialogues on amorous themes make a common form of folk song from China to Peru, and they've been on the go since the priestesses of antiquity sang their instructive hymns to the little temple harlots. The present version, however, is probably less than two hundred years old. It was well-known from Yorkshire to Somerset, its circulation stimulated partly through its appearance on broadsides published by Catnach and others, but also doubtless by virtue of its fond and striking image of the sailor's trousers shining like diamonds in the young girl's eyes. Dickens knew the song, and he makes Captain Cuttle sing a scrap of it in Dombey and Son. Frankie's graceful tune is substantially the one sung to Vaughan Williams by Mrs. Humphreys of Ingrave, near Brentwood, Essex.

2 The Green Valley
Most of our lost-love songs are from the girl's viewpoint. On this theme, girls' songs probably outnumber the boys' five to one, the proportion established by Bartók after a statistical survey of his huge East European collection, he concluded that "the figures mean that love relations are far more momentous to girls": fair enough. They're a confusing lot, these songs that tell no tale but convey a mood. They merely take a stock of images and commonplace verses, and combine and recombine them till one hardly knows whether one's hearing a dozen different songs or a dozen versions of the same lyrical piece. So it is with this one, entirely constructed of verses that crop up here and there in countless lost-love songs, Nor does the tune help much to distinguish one piece from the other. In this case it's a member of that vast melody-family of which *Died for Love* is the central figure.

3 Low Down in the Broom

Usually the "l" of this gentle lyric is a man, and the fuller, broadside, versions are spiced with an ingredient that's missing here, for the girl makes it clear she's at odds with her parents, father too miserly: mother too bossy, and so the story goes: *I took her round the middle so small and gently laid her down, And these were the words she said to me as she lay in the broom: "Do what you will, young man" she said, "tis all the same to me, For little does my mother think that I'm in the broom with thee."* Frankie's version is based on the set that W. P. Merrick noted from a good old Sussex singer, Henry Hills, in the opening weeks of the twentieth century. Grainger took some of the words of this version to fill out his unique but incomplete recording of Brigg Fair.

4 The Cruel Mother

A hard and eerie international tale. Unmarried Mother Slays Unwanted Babe; but there's more to it than a banal Sunday newspaper account. In most versions, the lady has triplets, kills them all, and binds them with her headscarf, her belt, her garters, to prevent the little ghosts from walking, but back they come (primitive people believe the spirits of infants that die under three years are specially malicious) to condemn her. A nightmare touch is provided by the bloodstains on the murder weapon that cannot be washed away. Lady Macbeth would have appreciated that bit. Children used this ballad as a ring-game, sung and danced with a gay lilt, two in the middle as mother and baby, three other children as avengers who chase the mother in and out of the circle. Annie Gilchrist noted a version in the Southport Orphanage in 1915. Child psychiatrists, forward, please.

5 The Crafty Maid's Policy

As a prose tale this joke has been current at least since the days of Beaumont and Fletcher. Versified into a song, it had probably been circulating for a long time before Disley of St Giles, London, printed it on a broadside c.1860. H. E. D. Hammond heard it sung to this tune by a grand singer, Mrs. Russell of Upwey, Dorset in 1907. Mrs. Russell had affection for songs about girl tricksters, and on the same occasion she sang the ace and deuce of crafty-maid songs, *The Broomfield Hill*.

6 The Maid on the Shore

Another girl trickster, but this time perhaps she's no ordinary girl at all. Seemingly at the mercy of a crew of rough sailors, she extricates herself with such aplomb that it's no wonder some country folk called the song: *The Mermaid*. The evocation of moonlight through the song seems to emphasise a supernatural atmosphere, though the delicate wit of it keeps the song's feet on the ground.

7 The Frog and the Mouse

Shepherds sing a version of it in Wedderburn's *CompIaynt of Scotland* (1549), and it was licensed as a blackletter ballad in 1580. Some say the blackletter was a remake of the older song, as a satire on the Duc d'Alencon's tentative courtship of Elizabeth l, but there's no firm evidence. Anyway, with little alteration of the verses, though with various changes in the refrain, the song has been a nursery and grown-ups' favourite ever since. The clown Grimaldi had a Music Hall success with it, during the first half of the nineteenth century, and the mad French artist Grandville made an astonishingly beautiful set of magic lantern slides, based on his version. A modern set ends: *But Nature ordered: As you were! Now we shan't have tadpoles covered in fur.* Frankie's version comes from the old Birmingham singer, Mrs. Cecilia Costello.

8 Lovely on the Water
Certain folk songs had great popularity, and have been reported over and again, from end to end of the country. Others - including some masterpieces - seem to have had but tiny circulation. So *Lovely on the Water,* with a gorgeous melody and significant words, has been found only once, by Vaughan Williams at South Walsham, a few miles from Norwich. The song starts idyllically and ends ominously, like a sunny day that clouds over. The singer, a Mr. Hilton, had fourteen verses, but Vaughan Williams, often a bit careless about texts, mislaid some. Missing verses probably concerned the familiar situation in which the girl volunteers to disguise herself as a seaman, in order to sail with her lover, but is hurriedly dissuaded.

9 The Brown Girl
A proud vengeful creature, spurned "because she was too brown". The implication is, she wasn't fine enough, ladies had lilywhite hands, skin as fair as milk; working girls got suntanned and coarsened in the field, unfit for gentlemen. The ballad, containing echoes of *Lord Thomas and Fair Eleanor, Barbara AIlen,* and others, doesn't seem to have been very common in its original form, more or less as Frankie sings it. But in altered shape, in which it is the man, sometimes a sailor, not the girl who is slighted and pitiless, it had wildfire success in England, as *The Dover Sailor* and the USA, as *A Rich Irish Lady.* One wonders why the switch made such a difference. Anyway, it's probably the outraged sweetheart's threat to dance on the lovesick one's grave that has done most to keep the song alive.

10 The Young Girl Cut Down in her Prime
A girl's descent through seduction and syphilis to the grave is traced with implacable lyricism. Originally the song concerned a raffish young soldier, Irish some say, who, similarly brought down, orders for himself a ceremonial funeral. At some time, who knows why, the ballad produced a parallel form, with the soldier transformed into an errant girl, but the military funeral motif persisted against all logic, and it stuck like a burr even when the ballad crossed the ocean and came to concern a dying cowboy in the streets of Laredo. The grand La-Mode (*Aeolian*) tune is basically that got by George Gardiner from Charles Sears in the Salisbury Workhouse in 1909.

11 The Unquiet Grave
A woman laments long over the grave of her sweetheart, till he speaks from the grave and reproaches her for disturbing his rest. Usually in the ballads the setting and the characters are named, but here we know neither the who nor the where, and the supernatural climate is further charged with mystery on that account. The tale is old, like the belief that too much grief disturbs the dead, though to this day, in Eastern Europe, some peasants believe that mourners' tears make an unsealing burn if they chance to light on a corpse. In some versions the dead person threatens to tear the living one to pieces, the favourite revenge of ghosts!, unless absolute fidelity can be sworn to. But Frankie's version is milder, more consolatory, as fits her gentle character. By and large, the tune she uses is one recorded by Vaughan Williams at Dilwyn, Herefordshire.

12 The Saucy Sailor
The nineteenth century seems to have loved this song, and the broadside printers issued it over and over again, starting with John Pitts of Seven Dials, London around 1815, through Disley and Hodges of the same neighbourhood c.1860, to Henry Such of the Borough towards the end of the century. "A great favourite with factory girls in the East End of London", reported William Barrett. Pretty well all our pioneer collectors seem to have found several versions, mostly sung to variants of the same tune. Frankie Armstrong's melody is one noted by Cecil Sharp in Somerset. He found the scale of it baffling, it doesn't fit into any standard mode ; a kind of Mixolydian with a flattened sixth, but in fact it's not all that unusual in some parts of Central and Eastern Europe. Still, in this case it may be as Sharp suspected, the unconscious invention of the singer himself. Handsome anyway.

13 The Two Sisters
On the Continent this ballad was a straightforward realistic lyrical tragedy, but as often happened when it spread to the North it picked up supernatural bits, including the savage notion of the singing bones that reveal a crime. Realistic English versions sometimes called *The Berkshire Tragedy*, exist side by side with Scots-Scandinavian magical ones. Sundry sets of the ballad carry various refrains, including "Bow down, bow down" (a dance instruction?) and "Binnorie o, Binnorie" (said to be the invention of Sir Walter Scott). The present refrain, about swans swimming bonny, probably got attached to the song in Ireland, where they're great on swans. Frankie's version derives mainly from a set noted by Frank Kidson from an Irish singer in Liverpool.

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