

The Famous Flower of Serving Men (Child 106)

- 1 YOU beautiful ladies, great and small,
I write unto you one and all,
Whereby that you may understand
What I have suffered in this land.
- 2 I was by birth a lady fair, 5
My father's chief and only heir,
But when my good old father dy'd,
Then was I made a young knight's bride.
- 3 And then my love built me a bower,
Bedeckt with many a fragrant flower; 10
A braver bower you never did see
Then my true-love did build for me.
- 4 But there came thieves late in the night,
They rob'd my bower, and slew my knight,
And after that my knight was slain, 15
I could no longer there remain.
- 5 My servants all from me did flye,
In the midst of my extremity,
And left me by my self alone,
With a heart more cold then any stone. 20
- 6 Yet, though my heart was full of care,
Heaven would not suffer me to despair;
Wherefore in hast I chang'd my name
From Fair Elise to Sweet William.
- 7 And therewithal I cut my hair, 25
And drest my self in man's attire,
My doublet, hose, and bever-hat,
And a golden band about my neck.

- 8 With a silver rapier by my side,
So like a gallant I did ride; 30
The thing that I delighted on,
Was for to be a serving-man.
- 9 Thus in my sumptuous man's array,
I bravely rode along the way;
And at the last it chanced so 35
That I unto the king's court did go.
- 10 Then to the king I bowed full low,
My love and duty for to show,
And so much favour I did crave
That I a serving-man's place might have. 40
- 11 'Stand up, brave youth, the king replyd,
'Thy service shall not be denyd;
But tell me first what thou canst do;
Thou shalt be fitted thereunto.
- 12 'Wilt thou be usher of my hall, 45
To wait upon my nobles all?
Or wilt thou be taster of my wine,
To wait on me when I shall dine?
- 13 'Or wilt thou be my chamberlain,
To make my bed both soft and fine? 50
Or wilt thou be one of my guard?
And I will give thee thy reward.'
- 14 Sweet William, with a smiling face,
Said to the king, If 't please your grace
To show such favour unto me, 55
Your chamberlain I fain would be.
- 15 The king then did the nobles call,
To ask the counsel of them all,

Who gave consent Sweet William he
The king's own chamberlain should be. 60

16 Now mark what strange things came to pass:
As the king one day a hunting was,
With all his lords and noble train,
Sweet William did at home remain.

17 Sweet William had no company then 65
With him at home but an old man;
And when he saw the coast was clear,
He took a lute which he had there.

18 Upon the lute Sweet William plaid,
And to the same he sung and said, 70
With a pleasant and most noble voice,
Which made the old man to rejoyce:

19 'My father was as brave a lord
As ever Europe did afford;
My mother was a lady bright, 75
My husband was a valiant knight.

20 'And I my self a lady gay,
Bedeckt with gorgeous rich array;
The bravest lady in the land
Had not more pleasures to command. 80

21 'I had my musick every day,
Harmonious lessons for to play;
I had my virgins fair and free,
Continually to wait on me.

22 'But now, alas! my husband 's dead, 85
And all my friends are from me fled;
My former joys are past and gone,
For now I am a serving-man.'

- 23 At last the king from hunting came,
And presently upon the same 90
He called for the good old man,
And thus to speak the king began.
- 24 'What news, what news, old man?' quod he;
'What news hast thou to tell to me?' 95
'Brave news,' the old man he did say;
'Sweet William is a lady gay.'
- 25 'If this be true thou tellest me
I 'le make thee a lord of high degree;
But if thy words do prove a lye, 100
Thou shalt be hanged up presently.'
- 26 But when the king the truth had found,
His joys did more and more abound;
According as the old man did say,
Sweet William was a lady gay. 105
- 27 Therefore the king without delay
Put on her glorious rich array,
And upon her head a crown of gold,
Which was most famous to behold.
- 28 And then, for fear of further strife, 110
He took Sweet William for his wife;
The like before was never seen,
A serving-man to be a queen.