

I Had But Fifty Cents

(a.k.a. "I took My Girl To A Dance One Night", "(When) I Had But Fifty Cents", "The Half Crown Song", "Only Half-A-Crown", "The Social Hop", "Eighteen Pence", "Pretty Little Dear", "Betsy Brown")

Words & Music:
Various Traditional

This is all Katie Crugnola's fault, but I thank her. She wrote in, asking help to find this song. So, of course, I just had to become obsessed with it. There are variations from English-speaking nations all 'round the globe. Audio of the two American versions can be found on the Max Hunter Folk Song Collection at Missouri State University. Per this great drinking songs site (<http://www.csufresno.edu/folklore/drinkingsongs/html/books-and-manuscripts/1960s/1961-songs-for-singing--frank-lynn/index.htm>), it can be found under the title "I took My Girl To A Dance One Night" in Frank Lynn's Songs For Singin' (1961). Meanwhile, the good folks at the Mudcat Café have discussed many versions of the song and revealed that some versions are two (or even three!) separate songs that were mashed-up in the early 20th century. Enjoy!

1. Version 1 - "I Had But Fifty Cents" as sung by Max Hunter, Springfield, Missouri on February 9, 1969 (Cat. #0687 (MFH #274)

<http://maxhunter.missouristate.edu/songinformation.aspx?id=687>

Bb F7
I took my girl to a dance one night, it was a social hop.
F7 Bb
We danced until th' lights went out an' th' music had to stop.
Bb Eb
I took her to a restaurant, th' finest in th' state.
Eb Bb
She said she wasn't hungry, but this is what she ate:
Bb F
A dozen raw, a plate of slaw, a chicken and a roast.
F Bb
Some applesass, and asparagrass and soft-shell crabs on toast.
Bb Eb
A box of stew, and crackers, too; her appetite was immense.
Eb Bb F Bb
When she asked for pie, I thought I'd die, for I had but fifty cents.

She said she wasn't hungry and didn't care to eat.
But I've got money in my clothes to bet she can't be beat.
She took it in so cozy, she had an awful tank.
She said she wasn't thirsty, but this is what she drank:
A whiskey skin, a glass of gin (which made me shake with' fear).
A ginger pop, with rum on top, a schooner then of beer.
A glass of ale, a gin cocktail; she should have had more sense.
When she called for more, I fell on th' floor, for I had fifty cents.

Of course I wasn't hungry and didn't care to eat.
Expecting every moment to be kicked out in th' street.
She said she'd fetch her family 'round some night, an' we'd have fun.
When I gave th' man fifty cents, this is what he done:
He tore my cloth'es, he smashed my nose, he hit me in th' jaw.
He gave me a prize of a two black eyes and with' me swept th' floor.
He took me where my pants hung loose and tossed me o'er th' fence.
Take my advice, don't try it twice, if you've got but fifty cents!

**2. Version 2 - "I Had But Fifty Cents" as sung by Mrs. Pearl Brewer,
Pocahontas, Arkansas on May 27, 1959 (Cat. #0347 (MFH #274)
<http://maxhunter.missouristate.edu/songinformation.aspx?ID=0347>)**

G C
I took my girl to a fancy ball, I thought we'd have some fun.
C G
I'll tell you guys, to my surprise, this is what she done.
G C
I took her into a cafeteria to give her a treat.
C G D7 G
She said she wasn't hungry, but this is what she eat:
G C
A dozen raws, a plate of slaw, chicken and some shrimp.
D7 G
She called for pie, I thought I'd die, for I had but fifty cents!

She stepped up to th' fountain, before that I could think.
She said, she wasn't thirsty, but this is what she drank:
A bottle of pop with rum on top, coffee and some tea.
Ginger ale, I sure looked pale, for this was killing me.

She said she'd bring her family around and we would have some fun.
I handed him th' fifty cents an' this is what he done:
He mashed my nose, he tore my clothes, he rolled me on th' floor.
He give me th' prize of two black eyes an' kicked me out at th' door.
He took me where my clothes hung loose an' threw me over th' fence.
Take my advice and don't buy twice, when you got but fifty cents!

3. Version 3 - Australian version (<http://warrenfahey.com/people/dd-18-pence.html> - alas, no chords or audio) as "The Social Hop" (as collected by Mrs. Doris Day of Highett Road, Hampton, Victoria.)

THE SOCIAL HOP
(Eighteen Pence)

I took my girl to a dance one night, it was a social hop.
We stayed till the dance was over and the music it had stopped.
We went to a restaurant, the finest in the street,
She said she wasn't hungry but this is what she eats:

A lobster claw, some beef steaks raw, some pickles and toast.
Fish stew & trotters, too, and some corned beef & roast.
Applesauce and asparagus, her appetite was immense.
I nearly fell through the floor when she said she wanted more,
For I only had eighteen pence!

She said she'd bring the family around and we'd have some fun.
So, I gave the bloke the eighteen pence and this is what he done:
He broke me nose, tore me clothes and a swipe under the jaw.
Gave a surprise, with a pair of black eyes, then threw me on the floor.
He took me where my pants are loose and chuck me over the fence.
So, take my advice and consider it twice if you only have eighteen pence.

4. Version 4 - Irish Version A, "The Half Crown Song" - perhaps a Galway tune. Heard on the Flanagan Brothers (Joe Flanagan) recording of 1933.

I took my girl to a fancy ball, it was a social hop.
We stayed all night until the break of daylight, waiting for the music to stop.
Into a restaurant we went, the finest on the street.
She said she was not hungry, but this is what she eat:
A dozen raw, a plate of slaw, a chicken and a roast.
Asparagrass and applesauce, with soft-shell crab on toast.
An Irish stew and dumplings, too. Her appetite made me frown.
When she called for pie, I thought I'd die, for I had but half a crown.

You bet I wasn't hungry. I didn't care to eat.
I've got money in my clothes, the best that can't be beat.
She took things so easy! She had an awful tank.
She said she was not thirsty, but this is what she drank:
A glass of ale, a gin cocktail; it made me shake with fear.
A ginger pop with rum on top, and then a jug of beer.
A whiskey stein, a glass of wine; she sure could drink it down!
When she called for more, I fell on the floor, for I had but half a crown.

You bet I wasn't hungry. I didn't care to eat,
Expecting every moment to be kicked out in the street.
She said she'd bring her friends around someday and we'd have fun.
I showed the man my two and six, and this is what he done:
He smashed my nose. He tore my clothes. He hit me on the head.
He grabbed me by the collar then, 'til I was nearly dead.
He caught me where my pants hung loose. He turned me upside down.
Take my advice: don't try it twice, when you got but half a crown.

5. Version 5 - Irish Version B the "Half-A-Crown" "sexy version" - also perhaps Galway.

Notes from Jim Carroll (Mudcat poster): "... This is the song we recorded from Travellers and from West Clare, along with the notes we used for Vincie Boyle's version on the CD, 'Around The Hills of Clare'. It can also be found on a shorter version on the Travellers' CD, From Puck to Appleby..."

The Half Crown
(Vincie Boyle & Miltown Malbay)

'Twas lately DeValera set out in the Dail,
Said the population of Ireland was beginning to fall;
And then to prevent it and not let it down,
To every child born he'd give a half crown.

I'm a young single man and I'm fed up of life,
I lately set out in search of a wife,
I married a widow and we both settled down,
And I'm doing my best for the blooming half crown.

The job, it proved harder than people may think.
The night we got married, sure, I ne'er slept a wink.
The wife, she keeps at me, she calls me a clown,
And said I'm doing nothing for the blooming half crown.

I'm a young married man and I'm tired of life;
Half killed and half crazy from this strap of a wife;
If we haven't a family 'tis me she will drown.
I'm in a hell of a fix for the blooming half crown.

Since the blooming thing started I'm nearly half dead;
Last night we broke down all the springs in the bed;
Said, she, "it's no us, for I'm now sixty three".
"Oh bedad then", says I, "there's no half crown for me".

So now I resemble a half hungry goose;
Every bone in my body disjointed and loose;
The people when pass me, they say with a frown;
"The cause of your death will be the half crown".

So all ye who're about to be wed;
Check your wife's age before going to bed;
Don't have her to tell you, as mine told me;
There's no half a crown from a three score and three.

A Children's Allowance of two shillings and sixpence for each child, introduced by Eamon deValera's newly elected Fianna Fa'il government in the early 1930s, gave rise to a number of songs and poems, and gave the term "making a half crown" a special meaning. This is one of those songs.

6. Version 6 - The Betsy Brown/Pretty Little Thing Mash-up (recorded by Frank Crumit in the 1920s)

I Had But Fifty Cents

She's a pretty little dear and she lives uptown.
Her daddy is a butcher and his name is Brown.
Her beauty is of a high renown. She's the girl for me.

Her eyes are bright as diamonds. Her teeth are white as pearls.
I tell you, boy, she's handsome, and you bet she's one of the girls.

She's a pretty little dear and she lives uptown.
Her daddy is a butcher and his name is Brown.
Her beauty is of a high renown. She's the girl for me.

We're going to get married tomorrow night.
I asked her daddy and he said, "All right."
I feel so bully, I've a notion to get tight.
But I know that wouldn't do,

Because her dad's a square old chap. He's the richest man in town.
He's going to give me a house and lot, along with Betsy brown.

She's a pretty little dear and she lives uptown.
Her daddy is a butcher and his name is brown.
Her beauty is of a high renown. She's the girl for me.

I took my girl to a dance one night. It was a social hop.
We danced until the lights went out. The music had to stop.
I took her to a restaurant, the finest in the state.
She said she wasn't hungry, but this is what she ate.

A dozen raw potato slaw, chicken and a roast,
Apple sass, asperagas, soft shelled crabs on toast,
Two big stew, crackers too. Her appetite was immense.
When she asked for pie, I thought I'd die, for I had but fifty cents.

She's a pretty little dear, etc.

7. Gerry B.'s nifty American version from Mudcat Café:

I took my girl to a fancy ball, it was a social hop.
We stayed until the lights went out, the music it did stop.
Then to a restaurant we went, the best one on the street;
She said she wasn't hungry, but this is what she eat:

A dozen rolls, a plate of slaw, a chicken and a roast,
Some applesass, asparagrass and soft shelled crabs on toast.
Next she tried some oysters fried, her appetite was immense!
When she called for pie I thought I'd die, for I had but fifty cents!

CHORUS:

Well, she is my hankie pankie, and I know she will come back;
I'll buy her a pair of brand new socks to wear on her poor old back,
A pound of cheese and a barrel of fleas to ride around the hack,
She is my 'Lizabeth Beecher from the County of Kalamazak.

Now after eating all of this, she smiled so very sweet;
She said she wasn't hungry and she wished that she could eat.
The very next order that she made, my heart within me sank!
She said she wasn't thirsty, but this is what she dranl:

A whiskey skin, a glass of gin, a schooner of lager beer,
A ginger pop with rum on top, and then some champagne clear,
A bottle of ale and a soda cocktail astonished all the gents!
When she called for more I fell on the floor,
for I had but fifty cents!

Now to finish up this delicate gal cleaned out an ice cream can.
She said, "Now Sam, I'll tell my ma you're such a nice young man".
She said she's bring her big sister along next she came for fun;
I handed the man the fifty cents, and this is what he done!

He broke my nose, he tore my clothes, he hit me in the jaw;
He gave me the prize of two black eyes, and with me swept the floor!
He took me where my pants were loose and fired me over the fence!
Take my advice, don't try it twice, if you have but fifty cents!

General Notes on the evolution of "Fifty Cents" song from the Mudcat Café:

"I Had But Fifty Cents" (from which the final two prodigious-eating verses were taken) and "Pretty Little Dear" (everything else in Frank Maher's text above) were originally two separate songs.

Evidently Frank Crumit was the one who crunched the two songs together as one. He recorded and copyrighted it in August 1926 as "Pretty Little Dear."

But "Betsey Brown" was a separate song in its own right, without the gorging. First to record it was Walter Morris for Columbia, Sept 1926. Al Hopkins and His Buckle Busters recorded it as "Betsy Brown" on October 23.

"Pretty Little Dear" was covered by half a dozen early country artists, and the melding of the two songs became standard. Yet they really don't sound very connected.

Meanwhile "(When) I Had But Fifty Cents" was recorded by numerous country artists beginning with Riley Puckett in 1924, Ernest Stoneman in 1925, Welby Toomey 1926, Bill Chitwood 1927 and so on. It generally did not have the "Pretty Little Dear / Betsy Brown" verses.

Gus Meade in his Country Music Sources traces "I Had But Fifty Cents" to a composition by Billy Mortimer - Dan Lewis 1881/Sam Devere, 18??).

He's less specific about "Betsy Brown," ("Pretty Little Dear"), but he traces it to an 1880 source whom / which he doesn't name.

I suppose this is another of those cases where two originally separate songs go on as one, like "Roll a Silver Dollar/Man Without a Woman." Myself, I like "Betsy Brown" in its original form, and prefer "I Had But Fifty Cents" as a separate pleasure, but that's just me.