

"The Great Silkie of Sule Skerry" is one of numerous tales of the 'Silkies,' or sealfolk, known to the inhabitants of the Orkney Islands and the Hebrides. These enchanted creatures dwell in the depth of the sea, occasionally doffing their seal skins to pass on land as mortal men. Legend has it that they then accept human partners, and some families on the islands actually trace their ancestry to such marriages. In more complete versions of the ballad the Silkie's forecast of the death of himself and his son (stanzas 5 and 6) eventually come to pass. The tune is by Dr. James Waters of Columbia University.

# Silkie

KEY: D CAPO: NONE PLAY: D

(CHILD NO. 113)

Moderately

The musical score is written in 3/4 time and consists of three systems. Each system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line in the left hand and a more melodic line in the right hand, often with slurs and ties. Chord symbols G(D) and F(C) are placed above the vocal line. The lyrics are: "An earthly nurse sits and sings, And Aye, she sings by li-ly wean, And". The tempo is marked "Moderately".

Chord symbols: G(D), F(C), G(D)

Lyrics: An earthly nurse sits and sings, And

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Dynamic marking: *p*

Performance instruction: *Pedal simile*

C(G) G(D) F(C) G(D) F(C) Am(Em)

lit-tle ken I my bairn's fath - er, Far less the land

Dm(Am) G(D) \*F G

where he dwells in.

\*As performed: G(D) to end.

2. For he came one night to her bed feet,  
And a grumbly guest, I'm sure was he,  
Saying "Here am I, thy bairn's father,  
Although I be not comely."
3. "I am a man upon the land,  
I am a silkie on the sea,  
And when I'm far and far frae land,  
My home it is in Sule Skerrie."
4. And he had ta'en a purse of gold  
And he had placed it upon her knee,  
Saying, "Give to me my little young son,  
And take thee up thy nurse's feè."
5. "And it shall come to pass on a summer's day,  
When the sun shines bright on every stane,  
I'll come and fetch my little young son,  
And teach him how to swim the faem."
6. "And ye shall marry a gunner good,  
And a right fine gunner I'm sure he'll be,  
And the very first shot that e'er he shoots  
Will kill both my young son and me."

