

# The Bludy Serk

By Robert Henryson

This hinder year I heard be tauld  
There was a worthy king;  
Dukis, eanlis, and baronis bauld  
He had at his bidding.  
The lord was ancient and auld,  
And sixty yeanis couth ring<sup>1</sup>;  
He had a dochter fair to fald<sup>2</sup>,  
A lusty lady ying<sup>3</sup>.

Of all fairheid<sup>4</sup> scho<sup>5</sup> bore the flour,  
And eke her faderis heir,  
Of lusty lait<sup>6</sup> and hie honour,  
Meek, bot and<sup>7</sup> debonair.  
Scho winnit<sup>8</sup> in a bigly<sup>9</sup> bour;  
On fold<sup>10</sup> was none so fair;  
Princes luvit her paramour,  
In countries owre all where<sup>11</sup>.

There dwelt a lite<sup>12</sup> beside the king  
A foul giand of ane<sup>13</sup>;  
Stolen he has the lady ying,  
Away with her is gane,  
And kest her in his dungeniflg,  
Where hicht scho nicht see nane;  
Hunger and cauld and great thnisting  
Scho fand in-to her wane<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Reign.

<sup>2</sup> Embrace.

<sup>3</sup> Young.

<sup>4</sup> Beauty.

<sup>5</sup> She.

<sup>6</sup> Manners.

<sup>7</sup> And also.

<sup>8</sup> Dwelt.

<sup>9</sup> Well-built.

<sup>10</sup> Earth.

<sup>11</sup> All over everywhere.

<sup>12</sup> Little.

<sup>13</sup> As any.

<sup>14</sup> In her dwelling place.

He was the laithiest on to luik  
That on the ground nicht gang;  
Ills nailes was like ane helhis cruik<sup>15</sup>,  
Therewith five quartenis lang.  
There was nane that he ourtuk,  
In richt or yit in wrang,  
Bot all in sunder he them shuke—  
The giand was so strang.

He held the lady day and nicht  
Within his deep dungeoun;  
He wahd nocht gife of her a sicht,  
For gold nor yit ransoun,  
Bot gil the king nicht get a knicht,  
To fecht with his persoun—  
To fecht with him both day and nicht,  
Whill<sup>16</sup> ane were dungin down<sup>17</sup>.

The king gart<sup>18</sup> seek baith far and near,  
Baith be sea and land,  
Of ony knicht gif he nicht hear  
Wald fecht with that gland.  
A worthy prince that had no peer  
Has ta'en the deed on hand,  
For the lufe of the lady clear,  
And held full true cunnand<sup>19</sup>.

That prince come proudly to the toun  
Of that giand to hear,  
And foucht with him his awn persoun<sup>20</sup>,  
And tuk him prisonér;  
And kest him in his awn dungeoun,  
Alane withouttin fere<sup>21</sup>,  
With hunger, cauld, and confusioun,  
As full well worthy were.

Syne<sup>22</sup> brak the hour, had hame the bricht<sup>23</sup>,  
Unto her fader dear;

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<sup>15</sup> Hell's crook.

<sup>16</sup> Till.

<sup>17</sup> Stricken down.

<sup>18</sup> Caused.

<sup>19</sup> Engagement.

<sup>20</sup> Himself.

<sup>21</sup> Comrade.

<sup>22</sup> Then.

<sup>23</sup> Fair one.

Sa evil woundit was the knicht  
That he behovit to die.  
Unluesume was his licame dicht<sup>24</sup>,  
His serk was all bludy;  
In all the warld was there a wicht  
So piteous for to see?

The lady murnit and made great maen,  
With all her meikle nicht:  
'I luvit never lufe bot ane,  
That dulefully now is dicht.  
God sen my life were fra me ta'en,  
Or I had seen yon sicht,  
Or ellis in begging ever to gane  
Furth with yon courteous knicht.'

He said, 'Fair lady, now maun I  
Die, traistly<sup>25</sup> ye me trow;  
Tak ye my serk that is bludy,  
And hing<sup>26</sup> it forrow you;  
First think on it, and syne on me,  
When men comis you to woo.'  
The lady said, 'Be Mary free,  
Thereto I mak avow.'

When that scho lukit to the serk,  
Scho thocht on the persoun,  
And prayit for him with all her heart,  
That lous'd her of bandoun<sup>27</sup>,  
Where scho was wont to sit full mirk  
In that deep dungeoun;  
And ever while scho was in quert<sup>28</sup>,  
That was her a lessoun.

Sa weil the lady luvit the knicht,  
That no man wald scho tak.  
Sa suld we do our God of nicht,  
That did all for us mak;  
Whilk<sup>29</sup> foulely to dede was dicht<sup>30</sup>  
For sinful manis sake;

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<sup>24</sup> Unlovely was his body dressed.

<sup>25</sup> Assuredly.

<sup>26</sup> Hang.

<sup>27</sup> Thraldom.

<sup>28</sup> Prison.

<sup>29</sup> Who.

<sup>30</sup> Done.

Sa suld we do both day and nicht,  
With prayenis to him mak.

This king is like the Tninitie,  
Baith in Heav'n and here;  
The manis saul to the lady;  
The giand to Lucifer;  
The knicht to Christ, that deit on tree<sup>31</sup>,  
And coft our sinnis dear;  
The pit to Hell, with painis fell;  
The sin to the wooer.

The lady was woo'd, bot scho said nay,  
With men that wald her wed  
Sa suld we writhe all sin away,  
That in our breist is bred.  
I pray to Jesu Christ very,  
For us his blude that bled,  
To be our help on Domesday,  
Where lawis are straitly led<sup>32</sup>.

The saul is Godis dochter dear,  
And eke his handiwerk,  
That was betrasit<sup>33</sup> with Lucifer,  
Wha sittis in Hell full mirk.  
Borrowit with Chnistis angel clear,  
Heynd men<sup>34</sup>, will ye nocht hark?  
For his lufe that bocht us dear,  
Think on the bludy serk.

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<sup>31</sup> Died on the cross.

<sup>32</sup> Unswervingly put in force.

<sup>33</sup> Betrayed.

<sup>34</sup> Good people.