

# Tam Lin

By Anonymous

*Perhaps some information may be collected from the following extract from the Records of Justiciary in Scotland, respecting the popular superstition on which this ballad is founded. I have made some considerable alterations in the tale itself—“Alison Pearson, of Byre-hill, confest, that she had haunted, and repaired with the gude neighbours, i. e. Fairies) and the Queen of Elfland, divers years by past, and that she had friends in that court, whilk were of her own blude. Item, that it was the gude neighbours, that cured her of her disease, when she was twelve years old and that she saw them making their salves, with pans and fyres; that they gathered the herbs before the sun was up; and Mr. William Sympson was with him, who was her cousin. When he was about eight years of age, he was taken away to Egypt, by an Egyptian, who was a giant, and with him he remined twelve years, and then came home. He was a young man, not six years older than herself; and, it was he, who taught her what herbs were fit to cure every disease, and particularly taught her to make a posset, which she gave to the Bishop of St. Andrews, when sick; and, Mr. William Sympson told her that he had been carried away by the gude neighbours, and bade her sign herself, that she might not be taken away for the tiend of them who are taken to hell every year.”—*

*The sole evidence against this poor creature, was her own confession, on the strength of which she was burned alive, in 1588.*

—“On! I forbid you, maidens all,  
“That wear gold in your hair,  
“To come or go by Kerton-hall,  
“For young Tam Lin is there!

“To the maid who goes by Kerton-hall,  
“Some foul trick still is play’d;  
“She loses her ring, or her mantle of green,  
“Or returns not thence a maid.”—

Janet has belted her kirtle of green,  
A little above her knee,  
And she’s away to Kerton-hall,  
As fast as go can she.

And when she came to Kerton-hall,  
Tam Lin was at the well;  
There she found his milk-white steed,  
But he was away himsel.

And near her was a bonny bush  
Of roses, red and white,  
And tempting did those roses seem,  
And no one was in sight.

She pull'd a white, she pull'd a red,  
And ask'd no owner's leave;  
When lo! from the bush sprang young Tam Lin,  
And caught her by the sleeve.

—“Now Janet, say, who gave to thee,  
“Yon roses in thy hand,  
“And why comest thou to Kerton-hall,  
“Against my strict command?”

“Who stole a rose from young Tam Lin,  
“Its price hath ever paid;  
“And the maid who came to Kerton-hall,  
“Never yet return'd a maid.”—

He fix'd on her his witching eye,  
He muttered elfin charms;  
Her head grew light, her heart beat quick,  
And she sank into his arms.

Janet has kilted her kirtle of green,  
A little above her knee,  
And she's away to her father's tower,  
As fast as go can she.

Four and twenty ladies fair,  
Were seen to play at ball,  
And out then came fair Janet once,  
The flower among them all.

Four and twenty ladies fair,  
To play at chess were seen,  
And out fair Janet came, her face  
As any grass was green.

Out then spake an old grey knight,  
As he lay on the castle wall,  
And says—“Alas! fair Janet, for thee,  
“Shall we now be blamed all.”—

—“Now hold your tongue, ye old grey knight,  
“An ill death may ye see!  
“Father my bairn whoever will,  
“I'll father none on thee!”—

Out then, spake her father dear,  
And he spake so meek and mild;  
—“And ever, alas! sweet Janet,”—he says,  
—“I think thou art with child!”—

—“If that I be with child, father,  
“Myself must bear the blame;  
“There’s never a laird about your hall,  
“Shall bear my leman’s name.

“But if my love were an earthly knight,  
“As he’s an elfin grey,  
“For never a laird in the land, would I  
“My true-love give away.

“The steed my true-love rides upon,  
“Is lighter than the wind;  
“With silver he is shod before,  
“With burning gold behind.”—

Janet has kilted her kirtle of green,  
A little above her knee,  
And she’s away to Kerton-hall,  
As fast as go can she.

And first she pull’d a white rose,  
And next she pull’d a red,  
And then from the bush sprang young Tam Lin,  
And thus to her he said.

“Now Janet, say, who gave to thee  
“Yon roses in thy hand?  
“And why comest thou to Kerton-hall  
“Against my strict command?”—

—“Oh! tell me, tell me, Tam Lin!” she says,  
“For his sake who died on tree,  
“If ever in holy chapel ye were,  
“Or Christendom did see

—“My grandsire he was Roxburgh’s earl,  
“And loved me passing well;  
“Seven years, alas! are nearly gone,  
“In hunting since I fell.

“The Queen of Fairies long had watch’d,  
“To work her wayward will,  
“She seized, and bore me straight away,  
“To dwell in you green hill.

“And pleasant is the fairy land,  
“But doleful ’tis to tell,  
“That once in every seven years,  
“We pay a tiend<sup>1</sup> to hell;  
“And I’m so fair, and full of flesh,  
“I fear, ’twill be mysel!

“But the night is Hallow-eën, lady,  
“The morn is Hallow-day;  
“So win me, win me, if you will,  
“For if you will, you may.

“Just at the mirk, and midnight hour,  
The fairy-folk will ride,  
And they, who would their true loves know,  
“At Miles-cross must abide.”—

—“But how shall I thee ken, Tam Lin,  
“Or how my true-love know,  
“Among so many stranger knights,  
“With that rabble rout who go?”—

“Oh! first let pass the black, lady,  
“And then let pass the brown;  
“But quickly run to the milk-white steed,  
“And draw its rider down.

“For I shall ride on the milk-white steed,  
“And be nearest to the town;  
“Because I was an earthly knight,  
“They give me that renown.

“My right hand will be gloved, lady,  
“My left hand will be bare;  
“Cockt up shall be my bonnet blue,  
“Comb’d down my yellow hair;  
“And by these signs I give to thee,  
“Thou’lt know, that I am there.

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<sup>1</sup> Toll.

“They’ll turn me into a snake in your arms,  
“But hold me fast the rather;  
Grasp me well, and fear me not,  
“That snake is your child’s father.

“They’ll turn me into a bear so grim,  
“And into a tyger wild!  
“But hold me fast, and fear me not,  
“As you do love your child.

“And last, they’ll turn me, in your arms,  
“To a bar of burning steel;  
“Then throw me into the stream with speed,  
“And thou no hurt shalt feel.

“But there, in place of the burning bar,  
“A naked knight thou’lt see,  
“Then cover me with thy cloak of green,  
“And I’ll thy true-love be.”—

Eerie, eerie, was the way,  
The night was dark and dread,  
When Janet in her mantle green,  
Alone to Miles-cross sped.

About the dead of night she heard  
The fairy-bridles ring;  
The lady was as glad at that,  
As any earthly thing.

First she let the black pass by,  
And next she let the brown,  
But quickly ran to the milk-white steed,  
And drew its rider down.

So well did she her task perform,  
That she her love did win,  
And blythe as birds in spring, she cast  
Her mantle round Tam Lin.

Out then spake the Queen o’ Fairies,  
Out of a bush o’ broom,  
—“She that has gotten young Tam Lin,  
“Has gotten a stately groom.”—

Out then spake the Queen o' Fairies,  
And an angry queen was she;  
—"Shame betide her ill-fared face,  
"And an ill death may she see;  
"For she's ta'en away the bonniest knight,  
"In all my companye!

"But had I guesst, Tam Lin," she said,  
"What to-night is come to pass,  
"I had scratch'd out thy two blue een,  
"And put in two een of glass!"—