



The Ballad of Janet & Tam Lin

“Oh, I forbid you maidens all
That wear gold in your hair
To come or go by Carterhaugh¹
For young Tam Lin is there.

And those that go by Carterhaugh
From them he takes a wad,²
Either their rings or green mantles
Or else their maidenheads!”

So Janet has kilted her green mantle
Just a little above her knee,
And she has gone to Carterhaugh
Just as fast as she could flee.

She had not pulled a double rose,
A rose but three or four,
When up and spoke this young Tam Lin,
Crying “Lady, pull no more!

How dare you pull those flowers!
How dare you break those wands!
How dare you come to Carterhaugh
Withouten my command?”

She says, “Carterhaugh it is my own;
My Father gave it me.
And I will come and go by here
Withouten any leave of thee!”

He's taken her by the milk-white hand
Among the leaves so green,
And what they did I cannot say;
The green leaves were between.

“Now since you've had your will of me
Come tell to me your name.”
But she nothing heard and nothing saw,
And all the woods grew dim.

Janet's kilted her green, green skirt
A little above her knee,
And she is to her father's hall
As fast as she can hie.

There were four and twenty ladies gay
All sitting down at chess,
In and come the fair Janet,
As pale as any glass.

Out then spoke an old grey knight
Lay over the castle wall,
“And ever alas, fair Janet, for thee,
But we'll be blamed for all.”

“Oh hold your tongue, you ill-faced knight,
Some ill death may you die!
Father my child on whom I will,
I'll father none on thee.”

Up and spake her father dear,
He spake up meek and mild,
“Oh alas, sweet Janet,” he cried,
“I fear you go with child!”

“And if I go with child,
It is myself to blame!
There's not a lord in all your hall
Shall give my child his name!

If my true love were an earthly knight
As he's an elfin grey,
I would not give my own true love
For any lord here today.

The horse that my true love rides on
Is lighter than the wind.
With silver he is shod before,
With burning gold behind.”

Out then spoke her mother dear,
“And ever alas,” said she,
“I know an herb in the merry green wood
That will scathe thy babe from thee.”

Janet has kilted her green mantle
Just a little above her knee,
And she has gone to Carterhaugh
For to pull the scathing tree.

A Celtic ballad collected in the 18th century by Robert Burns
This text is a combination of several versions

¹ A haugh is wild land next to a river that is under water part of the year | Carterhaugh is near the confluence of the Yarrow Water and the Ettrick Water in the Scottish Borderlands

² A wad is a pledge or fee

“How dare you pull that herb
All among the leaves so green,
For to kill the bonny babe
That we got us between!”

“You must tell to me Tam Lin,
Ah you must tell to me,
Were you once a mortal knight
Or mortal hall did see?”

“Oh, I will tell the truth, Janet—
A truth, I will not lie.
It's truth I've been in holy chapel
And christened as well as thee.

But once it fell upon a day
As hunting I did ride,
As I rode East and I rode West
Strange chance did me betide.

There blew a drowsy, drowsy wind
And sleep upon me fell.
The Queen of Fairies, she was there
And she took me to herself.

And pleasant is the Fairy Land
But a strange tale I'll tell,
For at the end of seven years
They pay a fine to Hell—
And I so fair and full of flesh,
I fear it is myself.

Tomorrow night is Halloween,
And the Fairy Folk do ride;
Those that would their true love win
At Miles Cross they must hide!”

“But how shall I thee ken, Tam Lin,
And how shall I thee know?
Among so many unearthly knights,
The like I never saw?”

“First you let pass the black horse
Then you let pass the brown,
But run up to the milk white steed
And pull the rider down.

First they'll change me in your arms
Into some esk³ or adder,
Hold me close and fear me not,
For I'm your child's father.

Then they'll turn me in your arms
Into a lion wild.

Hold me tight and fear me not
As you would hold your child.

Then they'll turn me in your arms
Into a red-hot bar of iron,
Hold me close and fear me not,
For I will do no harm.

Then they'll turn me in your arms
Into some burning lead,
Throw me into well-water
And throw me in with speed.

Last they'll turn me in your arms
Into a naked knight.
Wrap me up in your green mantle,
And hide me close from sight.”

Gloomy, gloomy was the night
And eerie was the way,
When Janet in her green mantle
To Miles Cross she did gae.

About the middle of the night
She heard the bridles ring.
Janet was as glad of that
As any mortal thing.

First went by the black, black steed
And then went by the brown,
But quickly she ran to the milk-white steed
And pulled the rider down.

And thunder rolled across the sky,
And the stars they burned like day
And out then spoke the Queen of the Fairies,
Crying, “Young Tam Lin's away!”

So well she did what he did say
She did her true love win,
She wrapped him up in her mantle,
As blythe as any bird in Spring.

Up and spake the Fairy Queen,
And angry cried she,
“If I'd have known of this, Tam Lin,
Before we came from home,
I'd have plucked out thine heart of flesh
And put in a heart of stone!”

If I'd but half the wit yestereen
That I have bought today,
I'd have paid my tithe seven times to Hell
Ere you'd been won away.”

³ An esk is a small snake