

Tam Lin

adapted by Brooke Bailey

from the ballad 39A, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 1882-1898 by Francis James Child

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There is a forest in Scotland where no maidens must ever go. It is called Carterhaugh, and Tam Lin is there. Any maiden who comes to Carterhaugh forest will sooner or later run into Tam Lin. He won't let you pass unless you leave him a ring, or a cloak, treasure or gold.

This is the story of the last maiden who ever met Tam Lin in Carterhaugh.

*Janet has kilted her green kirtle
a little above her knee
and she has braided her yellow hair
a little above her brow
and she's away go Carterhaugh
as fast as she can go.*

When she arrived in the forest, Tam Lin was hiding in a well. She did not see him, only his milk-white horse. The well was over run with roses, so she plucked one, just one. Suddenly Tam Lin sprang out of her and said, "Lady, don't you pick any more. You are not allowed. How dare you break a stem without my permission? In fact, how dare you come into Carterhaugh without my say-so?"

"Ha!" said Janet. "Carterhaugh is my forest, my father gave it to me. I'll come and go in Carterhaugh whenever I want to and who cares about you."

But nobody goes away from that well without leaving something with Tam Lin. Janet, she left her heart. Tam Lin laughed a friendly laugh at what she said, and gave her a rose, and... she fell in love.

*Janet has kilted her green kirtle
a little above her knee
and she has braided her yellow hair
a little above her brow
and she's away go Carterhaugh
as fast as she can go.*

Four and twenty ladies fair were playing ball at the castle where Janet lived. She came home, the flower of all of them. But today Janet looked sick, she looked sad. She was lovesick!

All the knights teased her. "Janet's in love? Is it me? Is it me? No, it must be me!"
"Who is it, Janet?" her father asked. "Tell me, and I will give you a wedding!"
"I would tell you, if I could, father," said Janet. "But my love is no knight, but a faery boy.

*The steed my true love rides on
is lighter than the wind,
with silver he is shod before,
and with gold behind."*

*Janet has kilted her green kirtle
a little above her knee
and she has braided her yellow hair
a little above her brow
and she's away go Carterhaugh
as fast as she can go.*

The next day Janet went back to the forest of Carterhaugh. Again Tam Lin was hiding in the well, and again she plucked a rose. Tam Lin appeared. "Put that rose back," he joked.

But Janet was sad. "Tell me, Tam Lin," she said. "I want to marry you, but how can I, if you are a faery who lives forever and who has to stay in a well? Tell me, Tam Lin, were you ever a human?"

And then Tam Lin told the story of his life.

"I was a human, once. I lived in a castle and had a good life. But one day, great sorrow befell me. It was a cold day, windy, sharp. The Queen of Faeries caught me, and took me away to this enchanted forest, to the Faery Land, to live with her forever.

And it's wonderful in the faery land, yes, you have everything you want. But at the end of every seven years, the faeries sacrifice someone to the spirits. And because I am so young and handsome, I think my turn is coming soon!

But you- you can save me, Janet! For tomorrow is Halloween night. Win me back, please Janet! Capture me away from the Queen of Faeries!

*Just at the mirk and midnight hour
the faery folk will ride
And those that would their true-love win
At Miles Cross must bide.*

All of the faeries, and me as well, we will be riding our horses in a long procession behind the Queen. We do it every Halloween.”

“But how will I know you, Tam Lin?” said Janet. “Among so many faery-knights, all in the dark, how will I know which is you?”

“Just remember this,” he said:

*“Oh first let the black pass, lady
And then let pass the brown
but quickly run to the milk-white steed
and pull his rider down!”*

The milk white steed is mine!

And when I am in your arms, Janet, you have to hold on to me, no matter what. They will try to scare you, Janet. They will turn me into a lizard and a snake. But hold me fast and fear me not. They will turn me into a bear and a lion, but hold me fast and fear me not. They will turn me into a hot rod of iron, hold me fast and fear me not, it won't hurt you, I'll do you no harm. Last of all they will set me on fire, and then you let go- throw me into this well, and I'll turn back into myself, human again! cover me with your green mantle, and hide me, take me home.”

*Gloomy, gloomy was the night
and eerie was the way
as brave Janet in her green mantle
to Miles Cross did go.*

At the mirk and midnight hour, she heard the sound of faery bridles, like tiny bells in the darkness. Silently, and glowing like stars, came the faery procession. First was the Queen, so beautiful to look at she was terrible. Then a parade of glowing knights and ladies on their horses.

*First she let the black pass by
and then she let the brown
but quickly she ran to the milk-white steed
and pulled his rider down!*

She held on, held on, as he was transformed into monstrous things. He was a lizard and then a snake, but she held him fast. He changed into a bear and a lion, but she held him fast. He changed into a hot rod of iron, but she held him fast and he did not burn her. Lastly he changed into a ball of fire! This she threw into the well. When he came out, he was shivering, in human form. Janet threw her green mantle around him and they ran away into the dark, fast as they could go.

The Queen of Faeries noticed instantly that one was missing from her train. She was angry! Her beautiful, terrible voice rang out into the dark woods.

“Taken him! She has taken Tam Lin! Shame on her ugly face, and may she die a cruel death! For she has taken the best knight of all my company! And if I ever catch you again, Tam Lin, I will pull out your two gray eyes, and stick them in a tree!”

But Janet and Tam Lin were out of Carterhaugh, and she could not get them.