

Joanna Baillie (1762-1851)

2 *The Ghost of Fadon*

On Gask's deserted ancient hall
Was twilight closing fast,
And, in its dismal shadows, all
Seem'd lofty, void, and vast.

All sounds of life, now reft and bare, 5
From its walls had pass'd away,
But the stir of small birds shelter'd there,
Dull owl, or clatt'ring jay.

Loop-hole and window, dimly seen,
With faint light passing through, 10
Grew dimmer still, and the dreary scene
Was fading from the view;

When the trampling sound of banded men
Came from the court without;
Words of debate and call, and then 15
A loud and angry shout.

But mingled echoes from within
A mimic mock'ry made,
And the bursting door with furious din,
On jarring hinges bray'd. 20

An eager band, press'd rear on van,
Rush'd in with clam'rous sound,
And their chief, the goodliest, bravest man,
That e'er trode Scottish ground.

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- Then spoke forthwith that leader bold,
“We war with wayward fate;
These walls are bare, the hearth is cold,
“And all is desolate.
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- “With fast unbroken and thirst unslaked
“Must we on the hard ground sleep?
“Or, like ghosts from vaulted charnel waked
“Our cheerless vigil keep?
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- “Hard hap this day in bloody field,
“Ye bravely have sustain’d,
“And for your pains this dismal bield,
“And empty board have gain’d.
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- “Hie, Malcolm, to that varlet’s steed,
“And search if yet remain
“Some homely store, but good at need,
“Spent nature to sustain.
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- “Cheer up, my friends! still, heart in hand,
“Though few and spent we be,
“We are the pith of our native land,
“And she shall still be free.
- “Cheer up! though scant and coarse our meal,
“In this our sad retreat,
“We’ll fill our horn to Scotland’s weal,
“And that will make it sweet.”
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- Then all, full cheerly, as they could,
Their willing service lent,
Some broke the boughs, some heap’d the wood,
Some struck the sparkling flint.

And a fire they kindled speedily,
Where the hall's last fire had been,
And pavement, walls, and rafters high,
In the rising blaze were seen.

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Red gleam on each tall buttress pour'd,
The lengthen'd hall along,
And tall and black behind them lower'd,
Their shadows deep and strong.

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The ceiling, ribb'd with massy oak,
From bick'ring flames below,
As light and shadow o'er it broke,
Seem'd wav'ring to and fro.

Their scanty meal was on the ground,
Spread by the friendly light,
And they made the brown-horn circle round,
As cheerly as they might.

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Some talk of horses, weapons, mail,
Some of their late defeat,
By treach'ry caused, and many a tale
Of Southron spy's retreat.

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"Ay, well," says one, "my sinking heart
Did some disaster bode,
When faithless Fadon's wily art
Beguiled us from the road.

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"But well repaid by Providence
Are such false deeds we see;
He's had his rightful recompence,
And cursed let him be."

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“Oh! curse him not! I needs must rue
 “That stroke so rashly given:
“If he to us were false or true,
 “Is known to righteous heaven.”

So spoke their chief, then silent all
 Remain’d in sombre mood,
Till they heard a bugle’s larum call
 Sound distant through the wood.

“Rouse ye, my friends!” the chieftain said,
 “That blast, from friend or foe,
“Comes from the west; through forest shade
 “With wary caution go.

“And bring me tidings. Speed ye well!”
 Forth three bold warriors pass’d:
Then from the east with fuller swell
 Was heard the bugle blast.

Out pass’d three warriors more: then shrill
 The horn blew from the north,
And other eager warriors still,
 As banded scouts, went forth.

Till from their chief each war-mate good
 Had to the forest gone,
And he, who feared not flesh and blood,
 Stood by the fire alone.

He stood, wrapp’d in a musing dream,
 Nor raised his drooping head,
Till a sudden, alter’d, paly gleam
 On all around was spread.

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- Such dull, diminish'd, sombre sheen
From moon eclipsed, by swain 110
Belated, or lone herd is seen,
O'er-mantling hill and plain.
- Then to the fitful fire he turn'd,
Which higher and brighter grew,
Till the flame like a baleful meteor burn'd, 115
Of clear sulphureous blue.
- Then wist the chief, some soul unblest,
Or spirit of power was near;
And his eyes adown the hall he cast,
Yet nought did there appear. 120
- But he felt a strange unearthly breath
Upon the chill air borne,
And he heard at the gate, like a blast of wrath,
The sound of Fadon's horn.
- Owls, bats, and swallows, flutt'ring, out 125
From hole and crevice flew,
Circling the lofty roof about,
As loud and long it blew.
- His noble hound sprang from his lair,
The midnight rouse to greet, 130
Then, like a timid trembling hare,
Crouch'd at his master's feet.
- Between his legs his drooping tail,
Like dog of vulgar race,
He hid, and with strange piteous wail, 135
Look'd in his master's face.

The porch seem'd void, but vapour dim
Soon fill'd the lowering room,
Then was he aware of a figure grim
Approaching through the gloom.

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And striding as it onward came,
The vapour wore away,
Till it stood distinctly by the flame,
Like a form in the noon of day.

Well Wallace knew that form, that head,
That throat unbraced and bare,
Mark'd deep with streaming circlet red,
And he utter'd a rapid prayer.

But when the spectre raised its arm,
And brandish'd its glitt'ring blade,
That moment broke fear's chilly charm
On noble Wallace laid.

The threaten'd combat was to him
Relief; with weapon bare,
He rush'd upon the warrior grim,
But his sword shore empty air[.]

Then the spectre smiled with a ghastly grin,
And its warrior-semblance fled,
And its features grew stony, fix'd, and thin,
Like the face of the stiffen'd dead.

160

The head a further moment crown'd
The body's stately wreck,
Shook hideously, and to the ground
Dropp'd from the bolter'd neck.

Back shrank the noble chief aghast, 165
And longer tarried not,
Then quickly to the portal pass'd,
To shun the horrid spot.

But in the portal, stiff and tall, 170
The apparition stood,
And Wallace turn'd and cross'd the hall,
Where entrance to the wood

By other door he hoped to snatch, 175
Whose pent arch darkly lower'd,
But there, like sentry on his watch,
The dreadful phantom tower'd.

Then up the ruin'd stairs so steep,
He ran with panting breath,
And from a window — desp'rate leap!
Sprang to the court beneath. 180

O'er wall and ditch he quickly got,
Through brake and bushy stream,
When suddenly through darkness shot
A red and lurid gleam.

He look'd behind, and that lurid light 185
Forth from the castle came;
Within its circuit through the night
Appear'd an elrich flame.

Red glow'd each window, slit, and door,
Like mouths of furnace hot, 190
And tint of deepest blackness wore
The walls and steepy moat.

But soon it rose with bright'ning power,
Till bush and ivy green,
And wall-flower, fringing breach and tower, 195
Distinctly might be seen.

A spreading blaze, with eddying sweep,
Its spiral surges rear'd;
Aloft then on the stately keep,
Lo! Fadon's Ghost appear'd. 200

A burning rafter, blazing bright,
It wielded in its hand;
And its warrior-form of human height,
Dilated grew, and grand.

Coped by a curling tawny cloud, 205
With tints sulphureous blent,
It rose with burst of thunder loud,
And up the welkin went.

High, high it rose with wid'ning glare,
Sent far o'er land and main, 210
And shot into the lofty air,
And all was dark again.

A spell of horror lapp'd him round,
Chill'd, motionless, amazed,
His very pulse of life was bound 215
As on black night he gazed.

Till harness'd warriors' heavy tread,
From echoing dell arose;
“Thank God!” with utter'd voice, he said,
“For here come living foes.” 220

With kindling soul that brand he drew
Which boldest Southron fears,
But soon the friendly call he knew,
Of his gallant brave compeers.

With haste each wondrous tale was told,

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How still, in vain pursuit,
They follow'd the horn through wood and wold,
And Wallace alone was mute.

Day rose; but silent, sad, and pale,

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Stood the bravest of Scottish race;
And each warrior's heart began to quail,
When he look'd in his leader's face.

1821

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