

Robert Burns (1759-96)

3 *The Five Carlins*

A Scottish Ballad

Tune — *Chevy-Chace*.

I.

There were five carlins in the south;  
They fell upon a scheme,  
To send a lad to Lunnun town,  
To bring them tidings hame.

II.

Not only bring them tidings hame, 5  
But do their errands there;  
And aiblins gowd and honour baith  
Might be that laddie's share.

III.

There was Maggy by the banks o' Nith, 10  
A dame wi' pride eneugh;  
And Marjory o' the mony lochs,  
A carlin auld and teugh.

IV.

And blinkin' Bess of Annandale, 15  
That dwelt near Solway-side;  
And whiskey Jean, that took her gill  
In Galloway sae wide.

V.

And black Joan, frae Crichton-peel, 20  
O' gipsy kith an' kin; —  
Five weightier carlins were na foun'  
The south countrie within.

VI.

To send a lad to Lunnun town,  
They met upon a day;

And mony a knight, and mony a laird,  
Their errand fain wad gae.

VII.

O mony a knight, and mony a laird, 25  
This errand fain wad gae;  
But nae ane could their fancy please,  
O ne'er a ane but twae.

VIII.

The first he was a belted knight, 30  
Bred o' a border-clan;  
And he wad gae to Lunnon town,  
Might nae man him withstan';

IX.

And he wad do their errands weel,  
And meikle he wad say;  
And ilka ane at Lunnon Court 35  
Wad bid to him guid-day.

X.

Then niest cam in a sodger youth,  
And spak' wi' modest grace,  
And he wad gae to Lunnon town,  
If sae their pleasure was. 40

XI.

He wad na hecht them courtly gifts,  
Nor meikle speech pretend;  
But he wad hecht an honest heart,  
Wad ne'er desert his friend.

XII.

Now, wham to chuse, and wham refuse, 45  
At strife thir carlins fell;  
For some had gentlefolks to please,  
And some wad please themsel'.

XIII.

Then out spak' mim-mou'd Meg o' Nith,

And she spak' up wi' pride, 50  
And she wad send the sodger youth,  
Whatever might betide.

XIV.

For the auld guidman o' Lunnon Court  
She dinna care a pin;  
But she wad send a sodger youth 55  
To greet his eldest son.

XV.

Then slow raise Marjory o' the Lochs,  
And wrinkled was her brow;  
Her ancient weed was russet grey,  
Her auld Scots bluid was true. 60

XVI.

“The Lunnon Court set light by me —  
I set as light by them;  
And I will send the sodger lad  
To shaw that Court the same.”

XVII.

Then up sprang Bess of Annandale, 65  
And swore a deadly aith,  
Says, “I will send the border-knight  
Spite o' you carlins baith.

XVIII.

“For far-aff fowls hae feathers fair,  
And fools o' change are fain; 70  
But I hae try'd this border-knight,  
An' I'll try him yet again.”

XIX.

Then whiskey Jean spak owre her drink,  
“Ye weel ken, kimmers a',  
The auld guidman o' Lunnon Court, 75  
His back's been at the wa'.

XX.

“And mony a friend that kiss’d his caup,  
Is now a fremit wight;  
But it’s ne’er be said o’ whiskey Jean, —  
I’ll send the border-knight.” 80

XXI.

Says black Joan frae Crichton-peel  
A carlin stoor and grim, —  
“The auld guidman, an’ the young guidman,  
For me may sink or swim.

XXII.

“For fools will prate o’ right and wrang, 85  
While knaves laugh in their sleeve;  
But wha blows best the horn shall win,  
I’ll speir nae courtier’s leave.”

XXIII.

Sae how this weighty plea may end  
Nae mortal wight can tell: 90  
God grant the king, and ilka man,  
May look weel to himsel’!

1789

(From *The Complete Works of Robert Burns*. Vol. 1.  
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