

Isa Craig-Knox (1831-1903)

1 *The Ballad of the Brides of Quair*

A stillness crept about the house,
At evenfall, in noon-tide glare;
Upon the silent hills looked forth
The many-windowed House of Quair.

The peacock on the terrace screamed; 5
Browsed on the lawn the timid hare;
The great trees grew i' the avenue,
Calm by the sheltered House of Quair.

The pool was still; around its brim
The alders sickened all the air; 10
There came no murmur from the streams,
Though nigh flowed Leithen, Tweed, and Quair.

The days hold on their wonted pace,
And men to court and camp repair,
Their part to fill, of good or ill, 15
While women keep the House of Quair.

And one is clad in widow's weeds,
And one is maiden-like and fair,
And day by day they seek the paths
About the lonely fields of Quair. 20

To see the trout leap in the streams,
The summer clouds reflected there,
The maiden loves in pensive dreams
To hang o'er silver Tweed and Quair.

Within, in pall-black velvet clad, 25
Sits stately in her oaken chair —
A stately dame of ancient name —
The Mother of the House of Quair.

Her daughter broiders by her side,
With heavy drooping golden hair, 30
And listens to her frequent plaint, —
“Ill fare the Brides that come to Quair!”

“For more than one hath lived in pine,
And more than one hath died of care,
And more than one hath sorely sinned, 35
Left lonely in the House of Quair.”

“Alas! and ere thy father died
I had not in his heart a share,
And now — may God fend her ill —
Thy brother brings his Bride to Quair!” 40

She came: they kissed her in the hall,
They hissed her on the winding stair,
They led her to her chamber high,
The fairest in the House of Quair.

They bade her from the window look, 45
And mark the scene how passing fair,
Among whose ways the quiet days
Would linger o’er the Wife of Quair.

“Tis fair,” she said on looking forth,
“But what although ’twere bleak and bare —” 50
She looked the love she did not speak,
And broke the ancient curse of Quair —

“Where’er he dwells, where’er he goes,
His dangers and his toils I share.”
What need be said — she was not one 55
Of the ill-fated Brides of Quair!

(From *Duchess Agnes, a Drama, and Other Poems*.
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