









But hard was that young lady's fate, 125  
    Yet she told her grief to none,  
But drooped and died of silent woe,  
    Ere the first twelve months were gone.

The second, she loved a gentleman  
    Below her own degree, 130  
A brave man, though not a golden piece  
    Nor a rood of land had he.

"Thou shalt not wed thee to my shame,"  
    Said the true young knight and bold;  
"I will cross the sea and gain me fame, 135  
    Shall serve instead of gold.

"I will bring me back a noble name,  
    Shall serve instead of land;  
Then, from thy proud sire, will I claim  
    Thy fair and gentle hand." 140

He crossed the sea and he won him fame  
    By his good broad sword and lance;  
He won him fame, but he lost his life  
    In the bloody fields of France.

Woe, woe to the gentle Isabel, 145  
    That she lived to see the day!  
For the tidings came like the lightning's stroke,  
    And her senses went away.

For many weary months she lived  
    A mournful, moping thing; 150  
Oft sitting 'neath the forest trees,  
    Or by some sylvan spring;

And singing of the wars of France,  
    And of the gallant men  
Who, fighting for their ladies' sakes, 155  
    Would soon come back again.

And never did her sense return,

Until the day she died;  
When her young sister Margaret  
Sate singing by her side. 160

Then, gazing with her thoughtful eyes,  
Her slumbering senses woke;  
And she died in Christ, the purest heart  
That ever true love broke.

Three years went on, and then a knight 165  
Sought gentle Margaret's hand;  
A knight renowned for gallant deeds,  
And rich in gold and land.

He loved fair Margaret in the halls,  
He loved her in the bower; 170  
And their young ardent passion grew,  
As grows the summer flower.

All gazed on them with joy and pride;  
He brave as she was fair;  
Again Earl Walter's soul was glad 175  
In looking on that pair.

But, when the bridal morn was come,  
Dim grew each look of pride;  
And musing went the wedding guests,  
And strove their thoughts to hide. 180

For some had dreamed a dismal dream,  
Some seen a fearful sign,  
Betokening that the bridal bread  
Was baked for funeral wine.

'Twas in the cheerful month of May, 185  
White was the flowering thorn,  
And every sunny slope was green  
With young blades of the corn,  
When the feast was set, and the guests were met,  
Upon the marriage morn. 190

“Sweet Margaret, haste!” the bridegroom said,  
“In the hall thy maidens stand;  
The priest is at the altar now,  
And the book is in his hand.”

Fair Margaret yet in her chamber sate, 195  
Before her mirror fair,  
Alone, save for the aged nurse,  
Who stood behind her chair.

And aye she combed her long, dark hair,  
And laid the graceful curls, 200  
And braided ’mong the drooping locks  
White roses wreathed with pearls.

“Now, nurse,” said she, “come to my side,  
Thou wont so glad to be;  
Oh, weep not thus behind my chair; 205  
My benison bide with thee!

“Tell me once more, before I leave  
My pleasant home for aye,  
The last words that my mother spake,  
On death-bed when she lay. 210

“Come, talk about my sisters dear;  
We all played at thy knee;  
We all were dear, and thou wast kind  
To all, but most to me.

“Thou hast been a mother unto me, 215  
My blessing on thee bide!”  
The old nurse kissed her lady’s cheek,  
And wiped her tears aside.

But now, beside the chamber stair,  
The bridegroom spake again: 220  
“Come, dearest Margaret; why so long  
Delay the wedding train?”

Fair Margaret, in her wedding dress,

As pure as the virgin snow,  
Was mounted upon a milk-white steed, 225  
That proudly moved, and slow.

And slowly she rode to Our Lady's church,  
With an earl on either side;  
And four and twenty maidens fair,  
To wait upon the bride. 230

There were garlands hung from tree to tree,  
And flowers strewn all the way;  
And people came from the country round  
To gaze on the rich array.

That day there was song and revelry, 235  
Loud mirth and noble cheer;  
The next, alas! there was wail and woe,  
For the bride lay on her bier.

They laid her upon her bridal bed,  
Like marble, deadly pale; 240  
With the wedding ring upon her hand,  
In her long white marriage veil.

The youthful bridegroom by her knelt,  
In woe none might beguile;  
And, after that sad morning broke, 245  
Was never seen to smile.

For her soul's peace he gave his lands,  
His goods to the poor he gave;  
And died a knight of the Holy Cross,  
Beside the Jordan's wave. 250

Earl Walter passed both out and in,  
With a firm unfaltering tread;  
But his brow grew wan, his cheek grew thin,  
And his eye as heavy as lead.

He met the guests, he sate at meat; 255  
But his was a joyless hall:



The hawk was never off the perch,  
The steed from out the stall.

His was a cureless grief of soul;  
He slowly wore away, 260  
Like an oak upon the rifted rock,  
Long struggling with decay.

At length, when he was worn and bowed,  
With grief and years grown old,  
It chanced that his tale unto the king 265  
By a noble knight was told.

The king he sent that noble knight  
Unto the pope at Rome,  
To humbly crave his holiness  
To abrogate his doom. 270

The pope gave absolution good:  
And this to him was read,  
As in his ninetieth year he lay  
Upon his dying bed.

Earl Walter raised his aged eyes, 275  
And gave great praise to Heaven:  
And by this token all men knew  
That his sin had been forgiven.

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