

Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775-1818)

1 *Alonzo the Brave and Fair Imogine*

A warrior so bold and a virgin so bright
Conversed, as they sat on the green;
They gazed on each other with tender delight:
Alonzo the Brave was the name of the knight,
The maid's was the Fair Imogine. 5

— “And, oh!” said the youth, “since to-morrow I go
“To fight in a far-distant land,
“Your tears for my absence soon leaving to flow,
“Some other will court you, and you will bestow
“On a wealthier suitor your hand.” — 10

— “Oh! hush these suspicions,” Fair Imogine said,
“Offensive to love and to me!
“For, if you be living, or if you be dead,
“I swear by the Virgin, that none in your stead
“Shall husband of Imogine be. 15

“And if e'er for another my heart should decide,
“Forgetting Alonzo the Brave,
“God grant, that, to punish my falsehood and pride,
“Your ghost at the marriage may sit by my side,
“May tax me with perjury, claim me as bride, 20
“And bear me away to the grave!” —

To Palestine hasten'd the hero so bold;
His love she lamented him sore:
But scarce had a twelvemonth elapsed, when behold,
A Baron all cover'd with jewels and gold 25
Arrived at Fair Imogine's door.

His treasure, his presents, his spacious domain,
Soon made her untrue to her vows:

He dazzled her eyes; he bewilder'd her brain;
He caught her affections so light and so vain, 30
And carried her home as his spouse.

And now had the marriage been bless'd by the priest;
The revelry now was begun:
The tables they groan'd with the weight of the feast;
Nor yet had the laughter and merriment ceased, 35
When the bell of the castle toll'd — "one!"

Then first with amazement Fair Imogine found
That a stranger was placed by her side:
His air was terrific; he utter'd no sound;
He spoke not, he moved not, he look'd not around, 40
But earnestly gazed on the bride.

His vizor was closed, and gigantic his height;
His armour was sable to view:
All pleasure and laughter were hush'd at his sight;
The dogs, as they eyed him, drew back in affright; 45
The lights in the chamber burnt blue!

His presence all bosoms appear'd to dismay;
The guests sat in silence and fear:
At length spoke the bride, while she trembled: — "I pray,
"Sir Knight, that your helmet aside you would lay, 50
"And deign to partake of our cheer." —

The lady is silent: the stranger complies,
His vizor he slowly unclosed:
Oh! then what a sight met Fair Imogine's eyes!
What words can express her dismay and surprise, 55
When a skeleton's head was exposed!

All present then utter'd a terrified shout;
All turn'd with disgust from the scene.
The worms they crept in, and the worms they crept out,
And sported his eyes and his temples about, 60

While the spectre address'd Imogine:

“Behold me, thou false one! behold me!” he cried;
“Remember Alonzo the Brave!
“God grants, that, to punish thy falsehood and pride,
“My ghost at thy marriage should sit by thy side, 65
“Should tax thee with perjury, claim thee as bride,
“And bear thee away to the grave!”

Thus saying, his arms round the lady he wound,
While loudly she shriek'd in dismay;
Then sank with his prey through the wide-yawning ground: 70
Nor ever again was Fair Imogine found,
Or the spectre who bore her away.

Not long lived the Baron: and none since that time
To inhabit the castle presume;
For chronicles tell, that, by order sublime, 75
There Imogine suffers the pain of her crime,
And mourns her deplorable doom.

At midnight four times in each year does her sprite,
When mortals in slumber are bound,
Array'd in her bridal apparel of white, 80
Appear in the hall with the skeleton-knight,
And shriek as he whirls her around.

While they drink out of skulls newly torn from the grave,
Dancing round them pale spectres are seen:
Their liquor is blood, and this horrible stave 85
They howl: — “To the health of Alonzo the Brave,
“And his consort, the False Imogine!”

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