

Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775-1818)

21 *Sir Agilthorn*

Oh! gentle huntsman, softly tread,  
And softly wind thy bugle-horn;  
Nor rudely break the silence shed  
Around the grave of Agilthorn!

Oh! gentle huntsman, if a tear, 5  
E'er dimm'd for other's woe thine eyes,  
Thou'lt surely dew, with drops sincere,  
The sod, where Lady Eva lies.

Yon crumbling chapel's sainted bound  
Their hands and hearts beheld them plight; 10  
Long held yon towers, with ivy crown'd,  
The beauteous dame and gallant knight.

Alas! the hour of bliss is past,  
For hark! the din of discord rings;  
War's clarion sounds, Joy hears the blast, 15  
And trembling plies his radiant wings.

And must sad Eva lose her lord?  
And must he seek the martial plain?  
Oh! see, she brings his casque and sword!  
Oh! hark, she pours her plaintive strain! 20

"Blest is the village damsel's fate,  
Though poor and low her station be;  
Safe from the cares which haunt the great,  
Safe from the cares which torture me!

"No doubting fear, no cruel pain, 25  
No dread suspense her breast alarms;  
No tyrant honour rules her swain,  
And tears him from her folding arms.

“She, careless wandering ’midst the rocks,  
In pleasing toil consumes the day; 30  
And tends her goats, or feeds her flocks,  
Or joins her rustic lover’s lay.

“Though hard her couch, each sorrow flies  
The pillow which supports her head;  
She sleeps, nor fears at morn her eyes 35  
Shall wake, to mourn an husband dead.

“Hush, impious fears! the good and brave  
Heaven’s arm will guard from danger free;  
When death with thousands gluts the grave,  
His dart, my love, shall glance from thee: 40

“While thine shall fly direct and sure,  
This buckler every blow repel;  
This casque from wounds that face secure,  
Where all the loves and graces dwell.

“This glittering scarf, with tenderest care, 45  
My hands in happier moments wove;  
Curst be the wretch, whose sword shall tear  
The spell-bound work of wedded love!

“Lo! on thy falchion, keen and bright,  
I shed a trembling consort’s tears; 50  
Oh! when their traces meet thy sight,  
Remember wretched Eva’s fears!

“Think, how thy lips she fondly press’d;  
Think, how she wept, compelled to part;  
Think, every wound, which scars thy breast, 55  
Is doubly marked on Eva’s heart!”

“O thou! my mistress, wife, and friend!”  
Thus Agilthorn with sighs began;  
“Thy fond complaints my bosom rend,  
Thy tears my fainting soul unman: 60

“In pity cease, my gentle dame,

Such sweetness and such grief to join!  
Lest I forget the voice of Fame,  
And only list to Love's and thine.

"Flow, flow, my tears, unbounded gush! 65  
Rise, rise, my sobs! I set ye free;  
Bleed, bleed, my heart! I need not blush  
To own, that life is dear to me.

"The wretch, whose lips have press'd the bowl, 70  
The bitter bowl of pain and woe,  
May careless reach his mortal goal,  
May boldly meet the final blow:

"His hopes destroyed, his comfort wreckt,  
A happier life he hopes to find;  
But what can I in heaven expect, 75  
Beyond the bliss I leave behind?

"Oh, no! the joys of yonder skies  
To prosperous love present no charms;  
My heaven is placed in Eva's eyes,  
My paradise in Eva's arms. 80

"Yet mark me, sweet! if Heaven's command  
Hath doom'd my fall in martial strife,  
Oh! let not anguish tempt thy hand  
To rashly break the thread of life!

"No! let our boy thy care engross, 85  
Let him thy stay, thy comfort, be;  
Supply his luckless father's loss,  
And love him for thyself and me.

"So may oblivion soon efface  
The grief, which clouds this fatal morn;  
And soon thy cheeks afford no trace 90  
Of tears, which fall for Agilthorn!"

He said, and couch'd his quivering lance;  
He said, and braced his moony shield;

Seal'd a last kiss, threw a last glance, 95  
Then spurr'd his steed to Flodden Field.

But Eva, of all joy bereft,  
Stood rooted at the castle gate,  
And view'd the prints his courser left,  
While hurrying at the call of fate. 100

Forebodings sad her bosom told,  
The steed, which bore him thence so light,  
Her longing eyes would ne'er behold  
Again bring home her own true knight.

While many a sigh her bosom heaves, 105  
She thus address'd her orphan page —  
“Dear youth, if e'er my love relieved  
The sorrows of thy infant age;

“If e'er I taught thy locks to play,  
Luxuriant, round thy blooming face; 110  
If e'er I wiped thy tears away,  
And bade them yield to smiles their place:

“Oh! speed thee, swift as steed can bear,  
Where Flodden groans with heaps of dead,  
And, o'er the combat, home repair, 115  
And tell me how my lord has sped.

“Till thou return'st, each hour's an age,  
An age employ'd in doubt and pain;  
Oh! haste thee, haste, my little foot-page,  
Oh! haste, and soon return again!” 120

“Now, lady dear, thy grief assuage!  
Good tidings soon shall ease thy pain:  
I'll haste, I'll haste, thy little foot-page  
I'll haste and soon return again.”

Then Oswy bade his courser fly; 125  
But still, while hapless Eva wept,  
Time scarcely seemed his wings to ply,

So slow the tedious moments crept.

And oft she kiss'd her baby's cheek,  
Who slumber'd on her throbbing breast; 130  
And now she bade the warder speak,  
And now she lull'd her child to rest.

"Good warder, say, what meets thy sight?  
What see'st thou from the castle tower?"  
"Nought but the rocks of Elginbright, 135  
Nought but the shades of Forest-Bower."

"Oh! pretty babe! thy mother's joy,  
Pledge of the purest, fondest flame,  
To-morrow's sun, dear helpless boy!  
Must see thee bear an orphan's name. 140

"Perhaps, e'en now, some Scottish sword  
The life-blood of thy father drains;  
Perhaps, e'en now, that heart is gored,  
Whose streams supplied thy little veins.

"O! warder, from the castle tower, 145  
Now say, what objects meet thy sight?"  
"None but the shades of Forest-Bower,  
None but the rocks of Elginbright."

"Smil'st thou, my babe? so smiled thy sire,  
When gazing on his Eva's face; 150  
His eyes shot beams of gentle fire,  
And joy'd such beams in mine to trace.

"Sleep, sleep, my babe! of care devoid;  
Thy mother breathes this fervent vow —  
Oh! never be thy soul employed 155  
On thoughts so sad as hers are now!

"Now warder, warder, speak again!  
What see'st thou from the turret's height?"  
"Oh! lady, speeding o'er the plain,  
The little foot-page appears in sight." 160

Quick beat her heart; short grew her breath;  
Close to her breast the babe she drew —  
“Now, Heaven,” she cried, “for life or death!”  
And forth to meet the page she flew.

“And is thy lord from danger free? 165  
And is the deadly combat o’er?”  
In silence Oswy bent his knee,  
And laid a scarf her feet before.

The well-known scarf with blood was stain’d,  
And tears from Oswy’s eye-lids fell; 170  
Too truly Eva’s heart explain’d,  
What meant those silent tears to tell.

“Come, come, my babe!” she wildly cried,  
“We needs must seek the field of woe;  
Come, come, my babe! cast fear aside! 175  
To dig thy father’s grave we go.”

“Stay, lady, stay! a storm impends;  
Lo! threatening clouds the sky o’erspread;  
The thunder roars, the rain descends,  
And lightning streaks the heavens with red. 180

“Hark! hark! the winds tempestuous rave!  
Oh! be thy dread intent resign’d!  
Or, if resolved the storm to brave,  
Be this dear infant left behind!”

“No! no! with me my baby stays; 185  
With me he lives; with me he dies;  
Flash, lightnings, flash! your friendly blaze  
Will show me where my warrior lies.”

O see! she roams the bloody field,  
And wildly shrieks her husband’s name; 190  
O see! she stops and eyes a shield,  
A heart, the symbol, wrapt in flame.

His armour broke in many a place,  
A knight lay stretch'd that shield beside;  
She raised his vizor, kiss'd his face, 195  
Then on his bosom sunk, and died.

Huntsman, their rustic grave behold:  
'Tis here, at night, the Fairy king,  
Where sleeps the fair, where sleeps the bold,  
Oft forms his light fantastic ring. 200

'Tis here, at eve, each village youth,  
With freshest flowers the turf adorns;  
'Tis here he swears eternal truth,  
By Eva's faith and Agilthorn's.

And here the virgins sadly tell, 205  
Each seated by her shepherd's side,  
How brave the gallant warrior fell,  
How true his lovely lady died.

Ah! gentle huntsman, pitying hear,  
And mourn the gentle lover's doom; 210  
Oh! gentle huntsman, drop a tear,  
And dew the turf of Eva's tomb!

So ne'er may fate thy hopes oppose;  
So ne'er may grief to thee be known:  
They, who can weep for others' woes, 215  
Should ne'er have cause to weep their own.

*1802-03*

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