

Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775-1818)

25 *The Water-King*

DANISH.

The original is in the Kiampe Viiser.

With gentle murmur flow'd the tide,
While by its fragrant flowery side
The lovely maid, with carols gay,
To Mary's church pursued her way.

The Water-Fiend's malignant eye 5
Along the banks beheld her hie;
Straight to his mother-witch he sped,
And thus in suppliant accents said:

— "Oh! mother! mother! now advise,
"How I may yonder maid surprise: 10
"Oh! mother! mother! now explain,
"How I may yonder maid obtain." —

The witch she gave him armour white;
She form'd him like a gallant knight:
Of water clear next made her hand 15
A steed, whose housings were of sand.

The Water-King then swift he went;
To Mary's church his steps he bent:
He bound his courser to the door,
And paced the churchyard three times four. 20

His courser to the door bound he,
And paced the churchyard four times three;
Then hasten'd up the aisle, where all
The people flock'd, both great and small.

The priest said, as the knight drew near, 25
— “And wherefore comes the white chief here?” —
The lovely maid she smiled aside;
— “Oh! would I were the white chief’s bride!” —

He stepp’d o’er benches one and two;
— “Oh! lovely maid, I die for you!” — 30
He stepp’d o’er benches two and three;
— “Oh! lovely maiden, go with me!” —

Then sweetly smiled the lovely maid;
And while she gave her hand, she said,
— “Betide me joy, betide me woe, 35
“O’er hill, o’er dale, with thee I go.” —

The priest their hands together joins;
They dance, while clear the moon-beam shines:
And little thinks the maiden bright,
Her partner is the Water-Spright. 40

Oh! had some spirit deign’d to sing,
— “Your bridegroom is the Water-King!” —
The maid had fear and hate confess’d,
And cursed the hand which then she press’d.

But nothing giving cause to think 45
How near she stray’d to danger’s brink,
Still on she went, and hand in hand
The lovers reach’d the yellow sand.

— “Ascend this steed with me, my dear!
“We needs must cross the streamlet here: 50
“Ride boldly in; it is not deep;
“The winds are hush’d, the billows sleep.” —

Thus spoke the Water-King. The maid
Her traitor-bridegroom’s wish obey’d:
And soon she saw the courser lave 55

Delighted in his parent wave.

— “Stop! stop! my love! The waters blue

“E’en now my shrinking foot bedew.” —

— “Oh! lay aside your fears, sweet heart!

“We now have reach’d the deepest part.” —

60

— “Stop! stop! my love! For now I see

“The waters rise above my knee.” —

— “Oh! lay aside your fears, sweet heart!

“We now have reach’d the deepest part.” —

— “Stop! stop! for God’s sake, stop! for oh!

65

“The waters o’er my bosom flow!” —

Scarce was the word pronounced, when knight

And courser vanish’d from her sight.

She shrieks, but shrieks in vain; for high

The wild winds rising, dull the cry;

70

The fiend exults; the billows dash,

And o’er their hapless victim wash.

Three times, while struggling with the stream,

The lovely maid was heard to scream;

But when the tempest’s rage was o’er,

75

The lovely maid was seen no more.

Warn’d by this tale, ye damsels fair,

To whom you give your love beware!

Believe not every handsome knight,

And dance not with the Water-Spright!

1796

As I have taken great liberties with this Ballad, and have been much questioned as to my share in it, I shall here subjoin a literal translation:

The Water-Man

— “Oh! mother, give me good counsel;
“How shall I obtain the lovely maid?” —

She form'd for him a horse of clear water,
With a bridle and saddle of sand.

She arm'd him like a gallant knight, 5
Then rode he into Mary's churchyard.

He bound his horse to the church door,
And paced round the church three times and four.

The Waterman enter'd the church;
The people throng'd about him both great and small. 10

The priest was then standing at the altar.
— “Who can yonder white chieftain be?” —

The lovely maiden laugh'd aside —
— “Oh! would the white chieftain were for me!” —

He stepp'd over one stool, and over two; 15
— “Oh! maiden, give me thy faith and troth!” —

He stepp'd over stools three and four.
— “Oh! lovely maiden go with me!” —

The lovely maid gave him her hand.
— “There hast thou my troth; I follow thee readily.” — 20

They went out with the wedding guests:
They danced gaily, and without thought of danger.

They danced on till they reached the strand:
And now they were alone hand in hand.

— “Lovely maiden, hold my horse: 25
“The prettiest little vessel will I bring for you.” —

And when they came to the white sand,

All the ships made to land.

And when they came to deep water
The lovely maiden sank to the ground.

30

Long heard they who stood on the shore,
How the lovely maiden shriek'd among the waves.

I advise you, damsels, as earnestly as I can,
Dance not with the Water-man.

(From *Tales of Wonder*. Written and Collected by M. G.
Lewis. Vol. 1. London, 1801)