

A. C. Swinbure (1837-1909)

8 *Burd Margaret*

“O wha will get me wheaten bread  
And wha will get me wine?  
And wha will build me a gold cradle  
To rock this child of mine?”

“There’s nane will drink of bitter wine, 5  
Nor eat of bitter bread;  
There’s nane will ca’ me a clean maiden  
When my body is dead.

“Nae silk maun come upon my feet,  
Nae gowd into my hair; 10  
My brothers smite me on the mouth,  
Where nae man shall kiss mair.”

She held her hands in the wan water  
Till the fingers were a’ red;  
Her face was like nae fair burd’s face 15  
That was her maidenhead.

She’s streekit the water on her hair,  
She’s signed it owre her chin,  
She’s streekit the water on her lips  
To let the draps gang in. 20

The tears ran through her fair sma’ mouth;  
The white bones small and thin  
Were waxen sharper in her lang throat,  
And in her wrist and chin.

“Gin my mither has wist o’ this 25  
When she was left wi’ me,

I wot these arms that are waxen lean  
Had ne'er gaun round a man's body.

"Gin my mither had dreamed a dream  
That sic a kail should fall on me, 30  
She had bound me between her smock and her kirtle,  
And cast me ower the sea.

"She had row'd me between her smock and her kirtle,  
Let me to swim or sink;  
And I had drunken o' the saut water 35  
Instead of tears to drink.

"The bairn that is waxen me within,  
It is waxen a pain to me;  
But weel lie he and ever weel  
That made my bairn's body. 40

"The white that was in my twa brows,  
I wot it is waxen red;  
But weel lie he and ever weel  
That had my maidenhead.

"O weel be to the fair red roses 45  
Stood high against my chin;  
But ill be to the good green leaves,  
For they were half the sin.

"O weel be to the little bird  
Sang low against my knee; 50  
But ill be to my fause nourice,  
She had sma' reck of me.

"O weel be to the fair red roses  
Stood high against my face;  
But ill be to the bonny rowan, 55  
I wish it never grace."

Burd Margaret lay in the rank water-grass  
By the fairest ford in Tyne;  
And between the grass and the aspen leaf,  
She saw their armour shine. 60

Burd Margaret lay in the low bracken  
That was sae green on Tyne;  
And between the reed and the wan willow,  
She saw the clean steel shine.

The first of them had fair Milan coats, 65  
The second had but pikes and jacks;  
The third had coats of fair scarlet,  
And gold across their caps.

There were three and three wi' bits of steel,  
And three and three wi' siller fine, 70  
And three and three wi' bits of gold,  
Was red as fair new wine.

“Whatten men be these that rin,” she said,  
“Or whatten men be these that ride?  
Either ye be thieves frae the north border, 75  
Or men that look a bride.”

“Gin I be rid frae the north border  
And my braw bride won south,  
I'll gar her clip me round the body  
And kiss me on the mouth.” 80

“I think ye be nae knight,” she said,  
“Nae knight that wons about;  
There was never main but a devil  
That had sae long a snout.

“Gin I should kiss your mouth,” she said, 85

“I wis I had kissed a loon;  
I think ye be some clouted carter,  
Albeit ye wear steel shoon.”

“I am Lord Hugh of Burnieshaw,  
Ye may weel ken the face o’ me; 90  
And I wad hae back the bonnie lad bairn  
That I left here wi’ thee.”

“Gin ye be Hughie of Burnieshaw  
As I trow a better may have been,  
Tell me what words I said to you, 95  
When the rowans were green.”

“O first ye pu’d the green berry,  
And syne ye pu’d the red;  
And the first word that ever ye spak  
Was to complain your maidenhead. 100

“O first ye pu’d the red hollin,  
And syne ye pu’d the green,  
And the first word ye spak to me  
Ye grat fu’ sair between.”

“Gin ye be Hughie of Burnieshaw, 105  
As I think weel ye’ll never be,  
Here have ye back your bonny lad bairn,  
That sair has troubled me.”

She’s caught her hand to his bridle-rein,  
Held up her mouth to touch his chin; 110  
“Ye garred me pu’ the girdle straight  
That the fair knave bairn was in.”

“What needs ye flur and mock, Margaret?  
What needs ye scorn at me?  
Ye never gat harm of your fause brothers, 115

But ye gat aye the mair gude o' me."

He's put his hands to her body,  
He's laid her twart his selle;  
And ye that hae gotten a bonny sitter,  
Gar keep the neist yoursell. 120

Aye they rode weel, and aye better,  
Until the moon was nigh to sheen;  
And aye the tears ran in her breast,  
And aye in the gold between.

"O whether is yon a cry of carlies, 125  
Or men that cry on me?"  
"Bide still, bide still, now, Burd Margaret,  
For ye hear naething but the sea.

"O whatten is yonder noise," she said,  
"That I hear cry on us behind?" 130  
"Haud by my sleeve now, Burd Margaret,  
For ye hear naething but the wind."

Aye they rode weel, and aye better,  
Until the moon was waxen weak;  
And aye she laid her face to his, 135  
And her tears ran by his cheek.

Aye when he kissed her bonny een,  
I wot they grat fu' sair;  
Aye when she laid her head to his,  
I wot the tears ran through his hair. 140

Aye they rode slow, and aye slower,  
Till the moon's time was a' done;  
Between the road and the saddle  
She thought to bear a son.

There she saw her first brother 145  
Stood back to a fair tree;  
Said "Grace go with our bonny sister  
To ride in sic a companie."

Said "Grace go with our bonny sister  
To wear her gown aside; 150  
It is not meet for a good woman  
To set her girdle wide."

He's stricken the first across the neck,  
Shorn clean his beard and hair;  
"Now haud ye weel, my fair brother, 155  
Ye'se get of me nae mair."

He's cloven the second through the chin,  
The third upon the knee;  
"Now haud ye weel, my three brothers,  
Ye'se get nae mair of me." 160

They set her in a fair bride-bed,  
Full glad she was the morn;  
And between the silk and the braw geld claith,  
The fair knave bairn was born.

*1909*

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