

Allan Cunningham (1784-1842)

2 *The Mermaid of Galloway*

There's a maid has sat on the green merse side
These ten lang years and mair;
An' every first night o' the new moon
She kames her yellow hair.

An' ay while she sheds the yellow burning gowd, 5
Fu' sweet she sings an' hie,
Till the fairest bird that woos the green wood,
Is charm'd wi' her melodie.

But wha e'er listens to that sweet sang,
Or gangs the dame to see, 10
Ne'er hears the sang o' the laverock again,
Nor wakens an earthly ee.

It fell in about the sweet simmer month,
I' the first come o' the moon,
That she sat o' the tap of a sea-weed rock, 15
A-kaming her silk-locks down.

Her kame was o' the whitely pearl,
Her hand like new-won milk;
Her breasts were all o' the snawy curd,
In a net o' sea-green silk. 20

She kamed her locks owre her white shoulders,
A fleece baith bonny and lang;
An' ilka ringlet she shed frae her brows,
She raised a lightsome sang.

I' the very first lilt o' that sweet sang, 25
 The birds forsook their young;
 An' they flew i' the gate o' the grey howlet,
 To listen the sweet maid's song.

I' the second lilt o' that sweet sang,
 Of sweetness it wes sae fu'; 30
 The tod leap'd out frae the frightened lambs,
 And dighted his red-wat mou'.

I' the very third lilt o' that sweet sang,
 Red lowed the new-woke moon;
 The stars drapped blude on the yellow gowan tap, 35
 Sax miles that maiden roun'.

'I hae dwalt on the Nith,' quo' the young Cowehill,
 'These twenty years an' three,
 But the sweetest sang e'er brake frae a lip,
 Comes thro' the green wood to me. 40

'O is it a voice frae twa earthly lips,
 Whilk makes sic melodie?
 It wad wile the lark frae the morning lift,
 And weel may it wile me.'

'I dreamed a dreary thing, master, 45
 Whilk I am rad ye rede;
 I dreamed ye kissed a pair o' sweet lips,
 That drapped o' red heart's-blede.'

'Come, haud my steed, ye little foot-page,
 Shod wi' the red gold roun'; 50
 Till I kiss the lips whilk sing sae sweet,
 An' lightlie lap he down.

'Kiss nae the singer's lips, master,
 Kiss nae the singer's chin;
 Touch nae her hand,' quo' the little foot-page, 55
 'If skaithless hame ye 'd win.

'O wha will sit on yere toom saddle,
 O wha will bruik yere gluve;
 An' wha will fauld yere erled bride,
 I' the kindly clasps o' luve?' 60

He took aff his hat, a' gold i' the rim,
 Knot wi' a siller ban';
 He seemed a' in lowe wi' his gold raiment,
 As thro' the green wood he ran.

'The simmer-dew fa's saft, fair maid, 65
 Aneath the siller moon;
 But eerie is thy seat i' the rock,
 Washed wi' the white sea faem.

'Come, wash me wi' thy lillie white hand,
 Below and aboon the knee; 70
 An' I'll kame thae links o' yellow burning gold,
 Aboon thy bonnie blue ee.

'How rosie are thy parting lips,
 How lillie-white thy skin,
 An' weel I wat thae kissing een 75
 Wad tempt a saint to sin.'

'Tak aff thae bars an' bobs o' gold,
 Wi' thy gared doublet fine;
 An' thraw me aff thy green mantle,
 Leafed wi' the siller twine. 80

‘An’ all in courtesie, fair knight,
 A maiden’s love to win;
 The gold lacing o’ thy green weeds
 Wad harm her lilie skin.’

Syne coost he aff his green mantle, 85
 Hemm’d wi’ the red gold roun’;
 His costly doublet coost he aff
 Wi’ red gold flow’red down.

‘Now ye maun kame my yellow hair,
 Down wi’ my pearlie kame; 90
 Then rowe me in thy green mantle,
 An’ take me maiden hame.

‘But first come take me ’neath the chin,
 An’ syne come kiss my cheek;
 An’ spread my hanks o’ wat’ry hair, 95
 I’ the new-moon beam to dreep.’

Sae first he kissed her dimpled chin,
 Syne kissed her rosie cheek;
 And lang he wooed her willin’ lips,
 Like heather-hinnie sweet! 100

‘O! if ye’ ll come to the bonnie Cowehill,
 ’Mang primrose banks to woo,
 I’ll wash thee ilk day i’ the new-milked milk,
 An’ bind wi’ gold yere brow.

‘An’ a’ for a drink o’ the clear water 105
 Ye ’se hae the rosie wine,
 An’ a’ for the water white lilie,
 Ye ’se hae these arms o’ mine.’

'But what 'll she say, yere bonnie young bride
 Busked wi' the siller fine, 110
 Whan the rich kisses ye kept for her lips,
 Are left wi' vows on mine?'

He took his lips frae her red-rose mou',
 His arms frae her waist sae sma';
 'Sweet maiden, I 'm in bridal speed, 115
 It 's time I were awa'.

'O gie me a token o' luv, sweet May,
 A leal luv-token true;
 She crapped a lock o' yellow golden hair,
 An' knotted it roun' his brow. 120

'O tie nae it sae strait, sweet May,
 But with luv's rose-knot kind;
 My head is full of burning pain,
 O saft ye maun it bind.'

His skin turned all o' the red-rose hue, 125
 Wi' draps o' bludie sweat;
 An' he laid his head 'mang the water lilies:
 'Sweet maiden, I maun sleep.'

She tyed ae link of her wet yellow hair,
 Aboon his buruing bree; 130
 Amang his curling haffet locks
 She knotted knurles three.

She weaved owre his brow the white lilie,
 Wi' witch-knots mae than nine;
 'Gif ye were seven times bridegroom owre, 135
 This night ye shall be mine.'

O twice he turned his sinking head,
An' twice he lifted his ee;
O twice he sought to loose the links
Were knotted owre his bree. 140

'Arise, sweet knight, yere young bride waits,
An' doubts her ale will sour;
An' wistly looks at the lilie-white sheets,
Down spread in ladie bower.

'An' she has preened the broidered silk, 145
About her white hause-bane;
Her princely petticoat is on,
Wi' gold can stan' its lane.'

He faintlie, slowlie, turn'd his cheek,
And faintly lift his ee, 150
And he strave to loose the witching bands
Aboon his burning bree.

Then took she up his green mantle
Of lowing gold the hem;
Then took she up his silken cap, 155
Rich wi' a siller stem;
An' she threw them wi' her lilie hand
Amang the white sea faem.

She took the bride ring frae his finger
An' threw it in the sea; 160
'That hand shall mense nae ither ring
But wi' the will o' me.'

She faulded him i' her lilie arms,
An' took her pearlie kame;
His fleecy locks trailed owre the sand 165

As she sought the white sea-faem.

First rose the star out owre the hill,
An' neist the lovely moon;
While the beauteous bride o' Galloway
Looked for her blythe bridegroom. 170

Lightlie she sang while the new moon rose,
Blythe as a young bride May,
Whan the New Moon lights her lamp o' luve,
An' blinks the bride away.

'Nithsdale, thou art a gay garden, 175
Wi' monie a winsome flower;
But the princeliest rose o' that garden
Maun blossom in my bower.

'O gentle be the wind on thy leaf,
And gentle the gloaming dew; 180
And bonnie and balmy be thy bud,
Of a pure and steadfast hue;
And she who sings this sang in thy praise,
Shall love thee leal and true.'

An' ay she sewed her silken snood, 185
An' sung a bridal sang;
But oft the tears drapt frae her ee,
Afore the grey morn cam'.

The sun leamed ruddie 'mang the dew,
Sae thick on bank and tree; 190
The plough-boy whistled at his darg,
The milk-may answered hie;
But the lovely bride o' Galloway
Sat wi' a tear-wet ee.

Ilk breath o' wind 'mang the forest leaves — 195
 She heard the bridegroom's tongue,
 And she heard the bridal-coming lilt
 In every bird which sung.

She sat high on the tap tower stane,
 Nae waiting May was there; 200
 She loosed the gold busk frae her breast,
 The kame frae 'mang her hair;
 She wiped the tear-blobs frae her ee,
 An' looked lang and sair.

First sang to her the blythe wee bird, 205
 Frae aff the hawthorn green:
 'Loose out the love curls frae yere hair,
 Ye plaited sae weel yestreen.'

An' the spreckled lark frae 'mang the clouds
 Of heaven came singing down: 210
 'Take out the bride-knots frae yere hair
 An' let these lang locks down.'

'Come, bide wi' me, ye pair o' sweet birds,
 Come down and bide wi' me;
 Ye sall peckle o' the bread an' drink o' the wine, 215
 And gold yere cage sall be.'

She laid the bride-cake 'neath her head,
 An' syne below her feet;
 An' laid her down 'tween the lillie-white sheets,
 An' soundlie did she sleep! 220

It seemed i' the mid-hour o' the night,
 Her siller-bell did ring;

