

Samuel Ferguson (1810-86)

1 *The Fairy Thorn*

An Ulster Ballad.

“Get up, our Anna dear, from the weary spinning wheel;
For your father’s on the hill, and your mother is asleep:
Come up above the crags, and we’ll dance a highland reel
Around the fairy thorn on the steep.”

At Anna Grace’s door ’twas thus the maidens cried, 5
Three merry maidens fair in kirtles of the green;
And Anna laid the rock and the weary wheel aside,
The fairest of the four, I ween.

They’re glancing through the glimmer of the quiet eve,
Away in milky wavings of neck and ankle bare; 10
The heavy-sliding stream in its sleepy song they leave,
And the crags in the ghostly air:

And linking hand and hand, and singing as they go,
The maids along the hill-side have ta’en their fearless way,
Till they come to where the rowan trees in lonely beauty grow 15
Beside the Fairy Hawthorn grey.

The Hawthorn stands between the ashes tall and slim,
Like matron with her twin grand-daughters at her knee;
The rowan berries cluster o’er her low head grey and dim
In ruddy kisses sweet to see. 20

The merry maidens four have ranged them in a row,
Between each lovely couple a stately rowan stem,
And away in mazes wavy, like skimming birds they go,
Oh, never carolled bird like them!

But solemn is the silence of the silvery haze 25
That drinks away their voices in echoless repose,

And dreamily the evening has stilled the haunted braes,
And dreamier the gloaming grows.

And sinking one by one, like lark-notes from the sky
When the falcon's shadow saileth across the open shaw, 30
Are hushed the maiden's voices, as cowering down they lie
In the flutter of their sudden awe.

For, from the air above, and the grassy ground beneath,
And from the mountain-ashes and the old Whitethorn between,
A power of faint enchantment doth through their beings breathe, 35
And they sink down together on the green.

They sink together silent, and stealing side to side,
They fling their lovely arms o'er their drooping necks so fair,
Then vainly strive again their naked arms to hide,
For their shrinking necks again are bare. 40

Thus clasped and prostrate all, with their heads together bowed,
Soft o'er their bosoms beating — the only human sound —
They hear the silky footsteps of the silent fairy crowd,
Like a river in the air, gliding round.

Nor scream can any raise, nor prayer can any say, 45
But wild, wild, the terror of the speechless three —
For they feel fair Anna Grace drawn silently away,
By whom they dare not look to see.

They feel their tresses twine with her parting locks of gold,
And the curls elastic falling, as her head withdraws; 50
They feel her sliding arms from their tranced arms unfold,
But they dare not look to see the cause:

For heavy on their senses the faint enchantment lies
Through all that night of anguish and perilous amaze;
And neither fear nor wonder can ope their quivering eyes 55
Or their limbs from the cold ground raise.

Till out of Night the Earth has rolled her dewy side,
With every haunted mountain and streamy vale below;
When, as the mist dissolves in the yellow morning tide,

The maidens' trance dissolveth so.

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Then fly the ghastly three as swiftly as they may,
And tell their tale of sorrow to anxious friends in vain —
They pined away and died within the year and day,
And ne'er was Anna Grace seen again.

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