

James Hogg (1770-1835)

5 *The Gude Greye Katt*

There wase ane katt, and ane gude greye katt,
That duallit in the tour of Blain;
And mony haif hearit of that gude katt,
That neur shall heare agayn.

Scho had ane brynd upon her backe, 5
And ane brent abone hir bree;
Hir culoris war the merilit heuis
That dappil the krene berrye.

But scho had that withyn hir ee
That man may neur declaire, 10
For scho had that withyn hir ee
Quhich mortyl docht na beare.

Sumtymis ane ladye sochte the tour,
Of rych and fayre beautye;
Sumtymis ane maukyn cam therin, 15
Hytchyng rycht wistfullye.

But quhan they serchit the tour of Blain,
And socht it sayre and lang,
They fand nocht but the gude greye katt
Sittyng thrummyng at hir sang; 20

And up scho rase aud pacit hir wayis
Full stetlye ower the stene,
And streikit out hir braw hint-leg,
As nocht at all had bene.

Weil mocht the wyfis in that kintrye 25
Rayse up ane grefous stir,
For neur ane katt in all the lande
Durst moop or melle wyth hir.

Quhaneuir theye lukit in her fece,
Their fearis greue se ryfe, 30
Theye snirtit and theye yollit throu frychte,
And rann for dethe and lyfe.

The Lairde of Blain he had ane spouis,
Beth cumlye, gude, and kynde;
But scho had gane to the landis of pece, 35
And left him sad behynde;

He had seuin dochteris all se fayre,
Of mayre than yerdlye grece,
Seuin bonnyer babyis neuir braithit ayre,
Or smylit in parentis fece. 40

Ane daye, quhan theye war all alane,
He sayde with hevye mene;
“Quhat will cum of ye, my deire babyis,
Now quhan your moderis gene?

“O quha will leide your tendyr myndis 45
The pethe of ladyhoode,
To thynke as ladye ocht to thynke,
And feele as mayden sholde?

“Weil mot it kythe in maydenis mynde,
And maydenis modestye, 50
The want of hir that weil wase fit
For taske unmeite for me!”

But up then spak the gude greye katt
That satt on the herthe stene,
“O hald yer tung, my deire maister, 55
Nor mak se sayre ane mene:

“For I will breide your seuin dochteris,
To winsum ladyhoode;
To thynke as ladyis ocht to thynke,
And feile as maydenis sholde. 60

“I’ll breide them fayre, I’ll breide them free

From every seye of syn,
Fayre as the blumyng roz withoute,
And pure in herte withyn.”

Rychte sayre astoundit wase the lairde, 65
Ane frychtenit man wase he;
But the sueite babyis war full faine,
And chicklit joifullye.

May Ella tooke the gude greye katt
Rychte fondlye on hir knee; 70
“And hethe my pussye lernit to speike?
I troue scho lernit of me.”

The katt, scho thrummyt at hir sang,
And turnit hir haffet sleike,
And drewe hir bonnye bassenyt side 75
Againste the babyis cheike.

But the lairde he was ane cunnyng lairde,
And he saide with spechis fayre,
“I haif a feste in hall to nychte,
Sueite pussye, be you there.” 80

The katt scho set ane luke on him,
That turnit his herte til stene;
“If you haif feste in hall to nychte,
I shall be there for ane.”

The feste wase laide, the tabil spread 85
With rych and nobil store,
And there wase set the byschope of Blain,
With all his holy kore;

He wase ane wyce and wylie wychte
Of wytch and warlockrye, 90
And mony ane wyfe had byrnit to coome,
Or hangit on ane tre.

He kenit their merkis and molis of hell,
And made them joifully

Ryde on the reid-het gad of ern, 95
 Ane plesaunt sycht to se.

The byschope said ane holye grace,
 Unpatiente to begyn,
 But nathyng of the gude greye katt
 Was funde the tour withyn; 100

But in there cam ane fayre ladye
 Cledd in the sylken sheene,
 Ane winsumer and bonnyer may
 On yerde was neur seene.

Scho tuke her sete at tabil heide, 105
 With courtlye modestye,
 Quhill ilken bosome byrnit with lufe,
 And waulit ilken ee.

Sueite was hir voyce to all the ryng,
 Unlesse the Lairde of Blain, 110
 For he had hearit that very voyce
 From off his own herthe stene.

He barrit the doris and windois fast,
 He barrit them to the jynne;
 “Now in the grece of Heuin,” said he, 115
 “Your excercyse begyn;

“There is ne grece nor happynesse
 For my poor babyis soulis,
 Until you trye that weirdlye wytch,
 And rost hir on the colis.” 120

“If this be scho,” the byschope saide,
 “This beauteous cumlye May,
 It is meite I try hir all alone
 To heire quhat scho will saye.”

“No,” quod the lairde, “I suthely sweire 125
 None shall from this proceide,
 Until I see that wycked wytch

Brynt til ane izel reide.”

The byschope knelit doune and prayit,
 Quhill all their hayris did creipe; 130
And aye he hoonit and he prayit,
 Quhill all war faste asleipe;

He prayit gain syn and Sauten bothe,
 And deidis of shyft and schame;
But all the tyme his faithful handis 135
 Pressit the cumlye dame.

Weil saw the lairde, but nething saide,
 He kenit, in holye zele
He grepit for the merkis of hell,
 Whilk he did ken ful weil. 140

And aye he pressit hir lillye hande,
 And kyssit it ferventlye,
And prayit betweine, for och ane kynde
 And lufyng preste was he!

The byschope stappit and sterted sore, 145
 Wide gaipen with affrychte,
For och that fayre and lillye hande
 Had turned ane paw outrychte!

Ane paw with long and crukit clawis:
 That breste of heuinlye charme 150
Had turnit till brusket of ane katt,
 Ful hayrie and ful warme!

And there scho satt on lang-settil,
 With een of glentyng flame,
And theye war on the byschope sett 155
 Lyke poynter on his game.

The byschope turnit him runde aboute,
 To se quhat he mocht se;
Scho strak ane clawe in ilken lug,
 And throu the rofe did flee. 160

The katt went throu withouten stop
Lyke schado throu the daye,
But the great byschopis fleschlye forme
Made all the rofe gif waye;

The silyng faldit lyke ane buke, 165
The serker crashit amayne,
And shredis and flenis of brokyn stenis
Fell to the grunde lyke rayne.

The braide ful mone wase up the lyft,
The nychte wase lyke ane daye, 170
As the greate byschope tuke his jante
Up throu the milkye-waye;

He cryit se loude and lustilye
The hillis and skyis war riuen;
Och sicken cryis war neur hearit 175
Atweine the yerde and heuin!

They sawe him spurryng in the ayre,
And flynging horredlye,
And than he prayit and sang ane saum,
For ane fearit wychte was he; 180

But aye his waylingis fainter greue
As the braide lyft he crossit,
Quhill sum saide that theye hearit them still,
And sum saide all wase loste.

There was ane herd on Dollar-Lawe, 185
Turnyng his flockis by nychte,
Or stealyng in ane gude haggysse
Before the mornyng lychte.

He hearit the cryis cum yont the heuin,
And sawe them bethe passe bye; 190
The katt scho skreuit up hir taile
As sayrlye pinchit to flye.

But aye scho thrummyt at hir sang,
 Though he wase sore in thrall,
Like katt that hethe ane jollye mouse 195
 Gaun murryng throu the hall.

That greye kattis sang it wase se sweete,
 As on the nychte it fell,
The murecokis dancit ane seuinsum ryng
 Arunde the hether bell; 200

The foumartis jyggit by the brukis,
 The maukinis by the kaile,
And the otar dancit ane minowaye
 As he gaed our the daile;

The hurchanis helde ane kintrye dance 205
 Along the brumye knowe,
And the gude toop-hogg rase fra his layre
 And ualtzit with the youe.

The Greye Kattis Sang

Murr, my lorde byschope,
 I syng to you; 210
Murr, my lord byschope,
 Bawllillilu!
Murr, my lord byschope, & c.

That nychte ane hynde on Border syde
 Chancit at his dore to be; 215
He spyit ane greate clypse of the mone,
 And ben the house ran he;

He laide ane wisp upon the colis,
 And bleue ful lang and sayre,
And rede tbe Belfaste Almanake, 220
 But the clypse it wase not there.

Och! but that hynde wase sor aghaste,
 And haf to madnesse driuen,
For he thochte he hearit ane drounyng man

225

Syching alangis the heuin.

That nychte ane greate fillossifere
 Had watchit on Etnyis height,
 To merk the rysing of the sonne,
 And the blythsum mornyng lychte;

230

And all the lychtlye lynis of goude,
 As on the se they fell;
 And watch the fyir and the smoke,
 Cum rummilyng up fra hell.

He lukit este, the daye cam on,
 Upon his gladsum pethe, 235
 And the braid mone hang in the west,
 Her palenesse wase lyke dethe;

And by her sat ane littil sterne
 Quhan all the laife war gane,
 It was lyke ane wee fadyng geme 240
 In the wyde worild its lane.

Then the fillossifere was sadde,
 And he turnit his ee awaye,
 For they mindit him of the yerdlye greate,
 In dethe or in decaye. 245

He turnit his face unto the north
 The fallyng teare to drie,
 And he spyit ane thing of wonderous maike,
 Atweine the yerde and skie;

250

It wase lyke ane burd withoutten wyng,
 Rychte wonderous to beholde,
 And it bure ane forked thyng alang,
 With swiftnesse manifolde:

But aye it greue as neare it dreue—
 His herte bete wondir sayre! 255
 The sonne, the mone, and sternis war gaine,
 He thochte of them ne mayre,

Quhan he behelde ane jollye preste
Cumyng swygyng throu the ayre.

The katt scho helde him by the luggis 260
Atour the ausum hole,
And och! the drede that he wase in
Wase mayre than man colde thole;

He cryit, "O pussye, hald your gryp,
Oh hald and dinna spaire; 265
Oh drap me in the yerde or se,
But dinna drap me there!"

But scho wase ane doure and deidlye katt,
And scho saide with lychtsum ayre,
"You kno heuin is ane blissit plece, 270
And all the prestis gang there."

"Oh sueite, sueite pussye, hald your gryp;
Spaire nouthur cleke nor clawe;
Is euir that lyke heuin abone,
In quhich am lyke to fa'?" 275

And aye scho hang him by the luggis
Abone the ausum den,
Till he fande the gryp rive slowlye out;
Sore was quakyng then!

Doune went the byschope, doune lyke leide, 280
Into the hollowe nychte;
His goune was flappyng in the ayre,
Quhan he was out of sychte.

They hearit him honyng doune the deep,
Till the croone it dyit awaye; 285
It wase lyke the stoune of ane great bom-be
Gaun soundyng throu the daye.

All wase in sloomeryng quietnesse,
Quhan he went doune to hell,
But seckn an houre wase neurir seine, 290

Quhan the gude lorde byschope fell.

Then cam the smouder and the smoke
Up raschyng vilentlye,
And it tourackit awaye til heuin
Ane gloryous sychte to se; 295

For aye it rowid its fleecye curlis
Out to the rysing sonne,
And the estern syde was gildit goude,
And all the westlin dunne.

Then the filossifere wase muvit, 300
And he wist not quhat til say,
For he saw nochte of the gude greye katt;
But he saw ane ladye gay.

Hir goune wase of the gress-grene silk,
And hir ee wase lyke the deue, 305
And hir hayre wase lyke tbe threidis of goude
That runde her shoulderis fleue.

Hir gairtenis war the raynbowis heme,
That scho tyit anethe hir knee,
And aye scho kemit hir yellow hayre, 310
And sang ful plesauntlye:

“I am the Queene of the Fairy Land,
I’ll do ne harme to thee,
For I am the gardian of the gude,
Let the wycked be ware of me. 315

“There are seuin pearlis in yonder tour,
Their number sune shall wane;
There are seuin flouris in fayre Scotland,
I’ll pu them ane by ane;

“And the weeist burd in all the bouir 320
Shall be the last thatis taene;
The Lairde of Blain hethe seuin dochteris,
But sune he shall haif nane.

“I’ll bathe them all in the krystal streime
Throu the fairy land that flouis, 325
I’ll seike the bouiris of paradyce
For the bonnyest flour that blouis,

“And I’ll distil it in the deue
That fallis on the hillis of heuin,
And the hues that luvly angelis weire 330
Shall to these maidis be giuen.

“And I’ll trie how luvlye and how fayre
Their formis may be to se,
And I’ll trie how pure the maydenis mynde
In this ill worild may be.” 335

The Lairde of Blain he walkis the wode,
But he walkis it all alane;
The Lairde of Blain had seuin dochteris,
But now he hethe not ane.

They neuir war on dethbed layde, 340
But they elyit all awaye;
He lost his babyis ane by ane
Atween the nychte and day.

He kend not quhat to thynk or saye,
Or quhat did him beseime, 345
But he walkit throu this weiry worild
Like ane thatis in a dreime.

Quhan seuin lang yearis, and seuin lang daies,
Had slowlye cumit and gane,
He walkit throu the gude grene wode, 350
And he walkit all alane;

He turnit his fece unto the skie,
And the teire stude in his ee,
For he thocht of the ladye of his lufe,
And his lost familye: 355

But aye his fayth was firm and sure,
And his trust in Heuin still,
For be hopit to meite them all agayne
Beyond the reiche of ill:

And aye the teiris fell on the grene, 360
As he knelit downe to praye;
But he wase se muvit with tendirnesse
That ane worde he colde not say.

He lukit oure his left shouldir
To se quhat he mocht se; 365
There he behelde seuin bonnye maydis
Cumyng tryppying owre the le!

Sic beautye ee had neur seine,
Nor euir agayne shall se;
Sic luvely formis of flesche and blude, 370
On yerde can neur be:

The joie that bemit in ilken ee
Wase lyke the risyng sonne;
The fayriste blumis in all the wode
Besyde their formis war dunne: 375

There wase ane wrethe on ilken heide,
On ilken bosom thre,
And the brychtest flouris the worlde e'er saw
War noddying owre the bre.

But cese yer strayne, my gude auld herpe, 380
O cese and syng ne mayre!
Gin ye wolde of that meityng tell,
Oh, I mocht reue it sayre!

There wolde ne ee in faire Scotland,
Nor luvely cheike be drie: 385
The laveroke wolde forget hir sang,
And drap deide fra the skie;

And the desye wolde ne mayre be quhyte,

And the lillye wolde chainge hir heue,
For the blude-drapis wolde fal fra the mone, 390
And reiden the mornyng deue.

But quhan I tell ye oute my tale,
Ful playnle ye will se,
That quhare there is ne syn nor schame
No sorroue there can be. 395

1816

(From *The Works of the Ettrick Shepherd*. With Memoir of
the Author by the Rev. Thomas Thomson. London: Blackie
& Son, 1876)