

Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775-1818)

13 *The Gay Gold Ring*

— “There is a thing, there is a thing,  
“Which I fain would have from thee!  
“I fain would have thy gay gold ring;  
“O! warrior, give it me?” —

He lifts his head; 5  
Lo! near his bed  
Stands a maid as fair as day;  
Cold is the night,  
Yet her garment is light,  
For her shift is her only array. 10

— “Come you from east,  
“Or come you from west,  
“Or dost from the Saracens flee?  
“Cold is the night,  
“And your garment is light, 15  
“Come, sweetheart, and warm you by me!” —

— “My garment is light,  
“And cold is the night,  
“And I would that my limbs were as cold:  
“Groan must I ever, 20  
“Sleep can I never,  
“Knight, till you give me your gay ring of gold!

“For that is a thing, a thing, a thing,  
“Which I fain would have from thee!  
“I fain would have thy gay gold ring; 25  
“O! warrior, give it me?” —

— “That ring Lord Brooke  
“From his daughter took;

“He gave it to me, and he swore,  
“That fair la-dye 30  
“My bride should be,  
“When this crusade were o’er.

“Ne’er did mine eyes that lady view,  
“Bright Emmeline by name:  
“But if fame say true, 35  
“Search Britain through,  
“You’ll find no fairer dame.

“But though she be fair,  
“She cannot compare,  
“I wot, sweet lass, with thee; 40  
“Then pass by my side  
“Three nights as my bride,  
“And thy guerdon the ring shall be!” —

In silence the maid  
The knight obey’d; 45  
Low on his pillow her head she laid:  
But soon as by hers *his* hand was press’d,  
Changed to ice was the heart in his breast;  
And his limbs were fetter’d in frozen chains,  
And turn’d to snow was the blood in his veins. 50

The cock now crows!  
The damsel goes  
Forth from the tent; and the blood which she froze,  
Again through the veins of Lord Elmerick flows,  
And again his heart with passion glows. 55

Donned the knight  
His armour bright;  
Full wroth was he, I trow!  
— “Beshrew me!” he said,  
“If thus, fair maid, 60  
“From my tent to-morrow you go!” —

Gone was light!  
Come was night!  
The sand-glass told, 'twas three;  
And again stood there 65  
The stranger fair,  
And murmur again did she.

— “There is a thing, there is a thing,  
“Which I fain would have from thee!  
“I fain would have thy gay gold ring; 70  
“O! warrior, give it me!” —

— “One night by my side  
“Hast thou pass'd as my bride;  
“Two yet remain behind:  
“Three must be pass'd, 75  
“Ere thy finger fast  
“The gay gold ring shall bind.” —

Again the maid  
The knight obey'd;  
Again on his pillow her head she laid; 80  
And again, when by hers *his* hand was press'd,  
Changed to ice was the heart in his breast:  
And his limbs were fetter'd in frozen chains,  
And turn'd to snow was the blood in his veins!

Three days were gone, two nights were spent; 85  
Still came the maid, when the glass told “three;”  
How she came, or whither she went,  
None could say, and none could see;  
But the warrior heard,  
When night the third 90  
Was gone, thus claim'd his plighted word.

— “Once! — twice! — thrice by your side  
“Have I lain as your bride;

“Sir Knight! Sir Knight, beware you!  
“Your ring I crave! 95  
“Your ring I’ll have,  
“Or limb from limb I’ll tear you!” —

She drew from his hand the ring so gay;  
No limb could he move, and no word could he say.  
— “See, Arthur, I bring 100  
“To my grave, thy ring,” —  
Murmur’d the maiden, and hied her away.

Then sprang so light  
From his couch the knight;  
With shame his cheek was red: 105  
And, filled with rage,  
His little foot page  
He call’d from beneath the bed.

— “Come hither, come hither,  
“My lad so lither; 110  
“While under my bed you lay,  
“What did you see,  
“And what maiden was she,  
“Who left me at breaking of day?” —

— “Oh! master, I 115  
“No maid could spy,  
“As I’ve a soul to save;  
“But when the cock crew,  
“The lamp burn’d blue,  
“And the tent smell’d like a grave! 120

“And I heard a voice in anguish moan,  
“And a bell seem’d four to tell;  
“And the voice was like a dying groan,  
“And the bell like a passing bell!” —

Lord Brooke look’d up, Lord Brooke look’d down, 125

Lord Brooke look'd over the plain;  
He saw come riding tow' rds the town,  
Of knights a jolly train:

— “Is it the king of Scottish land,  
“Or the prince of some far coun-trye, 130  
“That hither leads yon goodly band  
“To feast awhile with me?” —

— “Oh! it's not the prince of some far coun-trye,  
“Nor the king of Scottish land:  
“It's Elmerick come from beyond the sea, 135  
“To claim Lady Emmeline's hand.” —

Then down Lord Brooke's grey beard was seen  
A stream of tears to pour;  
— “Oh! death my daughter's spouse has been  
“These seven long years and more! 140

“Remorseful guilt and self-despite  
“Destroy'd that beauteous flower,  
“For that her falsehood kill'd a knight;  
“'Twas Arthur of the Bower.

“Sir Arthur gave her his heart to have, 145  
“And he gave her his troth to hold;  
“And he gave her his ring, so fair and brave,  
“Was all of the good red gold:

“And she gave him her word, that only he  
“Should kiss her as a bride; 150  
“And she gave him her oath, that ring should be  
“On her hand the day she died.

“But when she heard of Lord Elmerick's fame,  
“His wealth, and princely state;  
“And when she heard, that Lord Elmerick's name 155  
“Was praised by low and great,

“Did vanity full lightly bring  
    “My child to break her oath,  
“And to you she sent Sir Arthur’s ring,  
    “And to him sent back his troth. 160

“Oh! when he heard,  
“That her plighted word  
“His false love meant to break,  
“The youth grew sad,  
“And the youth grew mad, 165  
“And his sword he sprang to take:

“He set the point against his side,  
    “The hilt against the floor;  
“I wot, he made a wound so wide,  
    “He never a word spake more. 170

“And now, too late, my child began  
    “Remorseful tears to shed;  
“Her heart grew faint, her cheek grew wan,  
    “And she sicken’d, and took to her bed.

“The Leech then said, 175  
“And shook his head,  
“She ne’er could health recover;  
“Yet long in pain  
“Did the wretch remain,  
“Sorrowing for her lover. 180

“And sure ’twas a piteous sight to see,  
    “How she prayed to die, but it might not be;  
“And when the morning bell told three,  
    “Still in hollow voice cried she,

— “There is a thing, there is a thing, 185  
    “Which I fain would have from thee!  
“I fain would have thy gay gold ring;

“Oh! warrior, give it me!” —

Now who than ice was colder then,  
And who more pale than snow? 190  
And who was the saddest of all sad men?  
Lord Elmerick, I trow!

— “Oh! lead me, lead me to the place  
“Where Emmeline’s tomb doth stand,  
“For I must look on that lady’s face, 195  
“And touch that lady’s hand!” —

Then all who heard him, stood aghast,  
But not a word was said,  
While through the chapel’s yard they pass’d,  
And up the chancel sped. 200

They burst the tomb, so fair and sheen,  
Where Emmeline’s corse inclosed had been;  
And lo! on the skeleton’s finger so lean,  
Lord Elmerick’s gay gold ring was seen!

Damsels! damsels! mark aright 205  
The doleful tale I sing!  
Keep your vows, and heed your plight,  
And go to no warrior’s tent by night,  
To ask for a gay gold ring.

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