

A. M. F. Robinson (1857-1944)

4 *The Tower of St. Maur*

“Where’s my little son, Nourrice,  
And whither is he gone?  
The youngest son of all I have,  
He should not gang alone.”

“The child is safe enough, lady; 5  
He’s barely gone an hour:  
He’s gone to see the mason-men,  
Are building at the tower.”

“You should have kept him here, Nourrice, 10  
If I was sleeping then —  
He’s over young to gang alone  
Among the mason-men.”

“Lie still, lie still, my sweet lady, 15  
There’s nought to sorrow for;  
The child is safe enough, I think,  
I’ the keeping of St. Maur!”

An hour’s gone by, an hour or two,  
And still they’re out-of-door —  
“I wish they’d come at last, Nourrice,  
My heart is sick and sore.” 20

“Now hush, lady, my sweet lady,  
The moon’s still small and young;  
If they’re home before the curfew bell  
They’ll not ha’ stayed too long.”

St. Maur has ta’en his youngest son, 25  
To the riverside they’re gone,  
To see the busy mason-men  
Building a tower of stone.

“O why do they build the tower so strong  
Against the riverside? 30  
I never saw the wall, father,  
That was so strong and wide.”

“God knows the tower had need be strong  
Between my foes and thee!  
Should once Lord Armour enter, child, 35  
An ill death would ye dee.”

“We need not fear Lord Armour, father,  
Nor any of his kin;  
Since God has given us such a wall,  
They cannot enter in.” 40

“O twice, my babe, and thrice, my babe,  
Ere ever that I was born,  
Lord Armour’s men have entered in  
Betwixt the night and the morn.

“And once I found my nurse’s room 45  
Was red with bloody men . . .  
I would not have thy mother die  
As died my mother then.

“And ’tis not seven nights ago  
I heard, clear in a dream, 50  
The bugle cry of Armour,  
Shrill over wood and stream.”

“But if so foul a raid, father,  
Fell out so long ago,  
Why did they never build before 55  
A wall and tower of stone?”

“Many’s the time, my pretty babe,  
Ere ever this way you went,  
We built the tower both thick and broad —  
An’ we might as well ha’ stent. 60

“Many’s the time we built the tower,

Wi' the grey stone and the brown.  
But aye the floods in autumn  
Washed all the building down.

“And in my mind I see the morn  
When we'll be brought to dee —  
Yoursel' and your seven brothers,  
And your young mother, and me. 65

“And oh, were it any but Armour,  
Oh God, were it any but she —  
Before the Lord, my eyes grow dark  
With the ill sight that I see.” 70

Among the busy mason-men,  
Are building at the tower,  
There's a swarthy gipsy mason,  
A lean man and a dour. 75

He's lain the hammer down at last  
Out of his bony hand . . .  
“Did ye never hear the spell, St. Maur,  
Gars any tower to stand?” 80

“O what's the spell, thou black gipsy,  
I prithee rede it now:  
There never was a mason-man  
Shall earn such wage as thou.”

“I dare not speak the spell, St. Maur,  
Lest you should do me an ill,  
For a cruel spell, and an evil spell,  
Is the spell that works your will.” 85

“There's no spell but I'll risk it, man,  
An' the price were half my lands —  
To keep my wife and children safe  
Out of Lord Armour's hands.” 90

“O, more than lands, and more than fee,  
You'll pay me for the spell —”

“An’ the price were half my heart’s red blood,  
I’d pay it down as well.” 95

“O what’s the blood of a sinful heart  
To bind the stones that fall?  
St. Maur, you’ll build your christened child  
Alive into the wall.” 100

St. Maur has turned on his heel so light,  
And angry he turns away:  
“Gang to the devil another time  
When ye ask what ye ask to-day.”

He’s ta’en his young son by the hand — 105  
He’s opened wide the gate,  
“Your mother’s been sick a month by now,  
And she’ll mourn sore if we’re late.”

They had not gone a little way,  
An’ the child began to call — 110  
“See how the flood runs high, father,  
And washes at the wall!”

They had not gone a mickle way,  
St. Maur began to brood,  
“Tis the bugle cry of Armour,  
Shrill over stream and wood.” 115

“And must they slay me, father dear,  
And my seven brothers tall?”  
“Gin that’s the blast of Armour, laddie,  
I fear they’ll slay us all.” 120

“And will they slay my mother, then,  
That looks so bonny and small?”  
“Come back, come back, thou little lad  
To the masons at the wall.”

The flood runs high and still more high, 125  
And washes stone from stone —  
“In another hour,” say the masons,

“Our work is all undone.”

The flood runs high and still more high,  
And the bugle rings anear; 130  
The masons looking o’er the wall  
Are blue and stark with fear.

There’s one that’s neither stark nor wan  
Bur never he looked so well;  
“Shall I gang to the devil, St. Maur?” he cries 135  
“Or say, shall I gang to yoursel’?”

He’s set the child high in the air  
Upon his shoulder bone;  
“Shall I leave them all for Armour,  
Or shall I take but one?” 140

Never an answer spake St. Maur,  
And never a work he said:  
There was not one o’ the mason-men  
Looked half so wan and dead.

The gipsy’s ta’en the frightened child 145  
And set him in the wall:  
“There’s a bonny game to play, little man,  
The bonniest game of all.

“You’ll stand so still and stark, my lad;  
I’ll build in two’s and three’s; 150  
And I’ll throw you a red, red apple in,  
When the stones reach to your knees.

“You’ll stand so still and stark, my lad;  
I’ll lay the stones in haste;  
And I’ll throw you the forester’s whistle 155  
When they reach above your waist.

“You’ll stand so still and stark, my lad,  
You’ll watch the stones that rise;  
And I’ll throw you in your father’s sword,  
When they reach above your eyes. 160

“And if you tire o’ the play, my lad,  
You’ve but to raise a shout:  
At the least word o’ your father’s mouth,  
I’ll stop and pluck you out.”

The gipsy-man build quick and light, 165  
As if he played a play,  
And the child laughs with a frightened laugh,  
And the tower ceases to sway.

St. Maur stares out of his bloodshot eyes,  
Like one that’s well nigh mad; 170  
The tower stands fast, and the stones rise high  
About the little lad.

“O father, father, lift me out!  
The stones reach over my eyes,  
And I cannot see you now, father, 175  
So swift the walls uprise.

“O father, lift me out, father!  
I cannot breathe at all,  
For the stones reach up beyond my head,  
And it’s dark down i’ the wall.” 180

But never an answer spake St. Maur,  
Never a word but one:  
“Have you finished your devil’s work, mason,  
Or when will the deed be done?”

“Oh, the work is done that ye wished, St. Maur, 185  
’Twill last for many a year;  
There’s scarce a sound in the wall by now  
A mother might not hear.

“Gang home, gang home in peace, St. Maur,  
And sleep sound if you can; 190  
There’s never a flood shall rock this tower,  
And never a mortal man.

“Gang home and kiss your bonny wife,  
And bid her mourn and fast . . .  
She’ll weep a year for her youngest child,                   195  
But she’ll dry her eyes at last.

“You’ll say he fell in the flood, St. Maur,  
But you’ll not deceive yoursel’,  
For you’ve lost the bonniest thing you had,  
And you’ll remember well.   200

“Your wife will mourn him a year, St. Maur,  
You’ll mourn him all your life,  
For you’ve lost the bonniest thing you had,  
Better than bairns or wife.”

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